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FUSION



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FUSION

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XENOTILT: HOSTILE PINBALL ACTION

ANDREW FISHER
TACKLES THE
SEQUEL TO 2019'S
DEMON'S TILT



ARCADE 1UP

THE FUSION
TEAM REVIEW
THEIR OWN
CABINETS AND
DEBATE THE
WISDOM OF
INVESTING IN ONE
FOR YOURSELF



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FUSION

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Publisher
since 2006



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FUSION

My love of video games began in the arcades. Long before the Amstrad's green-screen monitor beamed pixels into my mind from the comfort of my own home, I was enchanted by these big gaming machines at the fair, the bus station, or even the chip shop. For a long time, arcade games represented the best video games available. They were light years ahead of anything we had at home! When the proliferation of the home console left the arcades behind - something was lost. We had more games to play than ever, but they would never be presented to us in such a bombastic and exciting way again.

Some of us still pine for a piece of that arcade magic today, but owning and maintaining vintage arcade machines is an expensive business. Arcade 1UP's line of three-quarter-scale cabinets has been very successful in recent years, and some of us here at FUSION have taken the plunge and bought one (or three). So, for this issue, we thought we'd have a chat about our experiences with Arcade 1UP and give you the verdict on our machines.

When you've finished spending all your change, we also have a plethora of other features and reviews for you this month. However, I'll direct you to the Contents listing for those because I seem to have used up all my space talking about the arcades. Enjoy the issue, and see you next month for the big FUSION 50.

MISSION START!



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Ben Honebone

FUSION Issue 49

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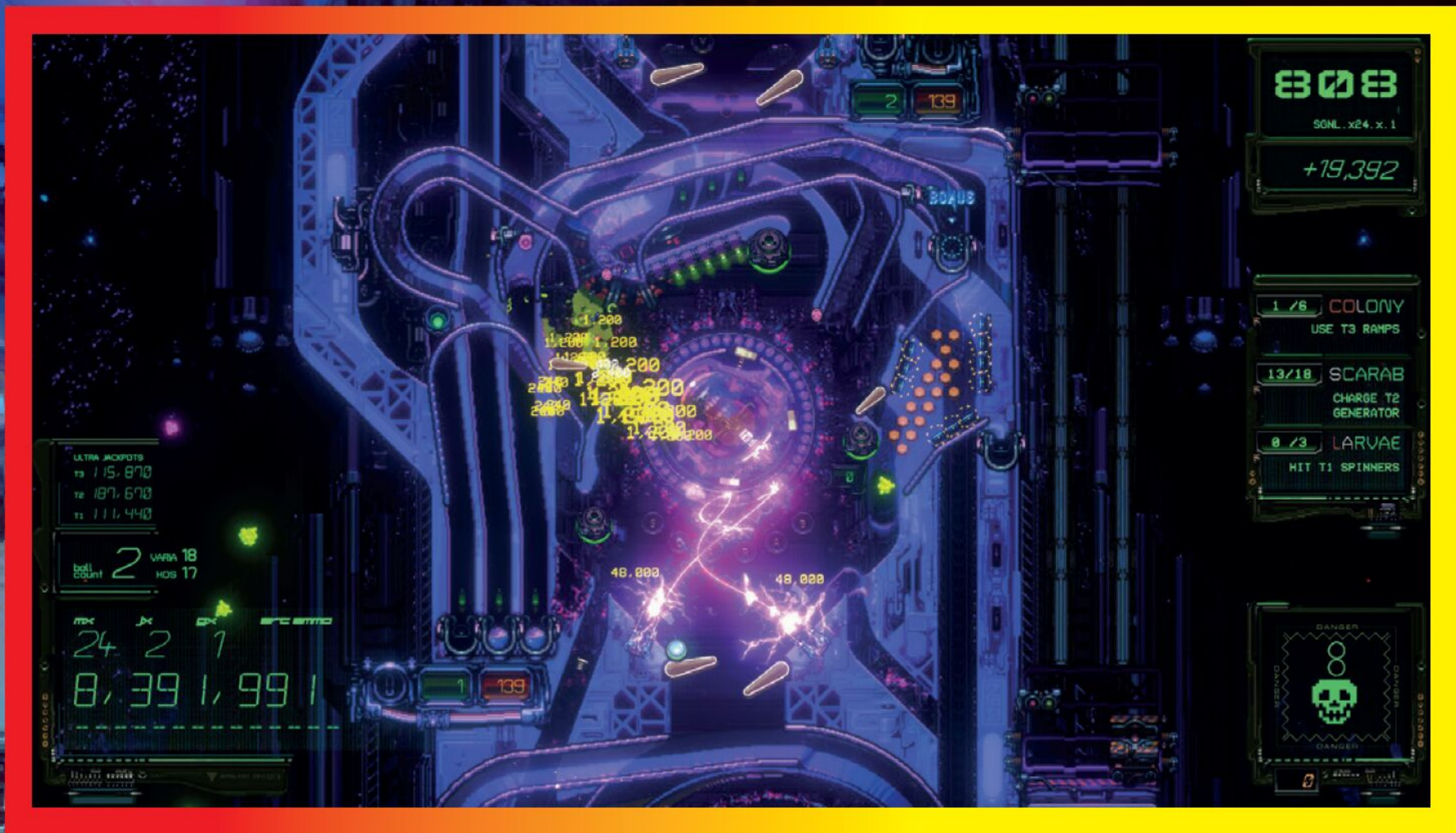
XENOTILT™

HOSTILE PINBALL ACTION

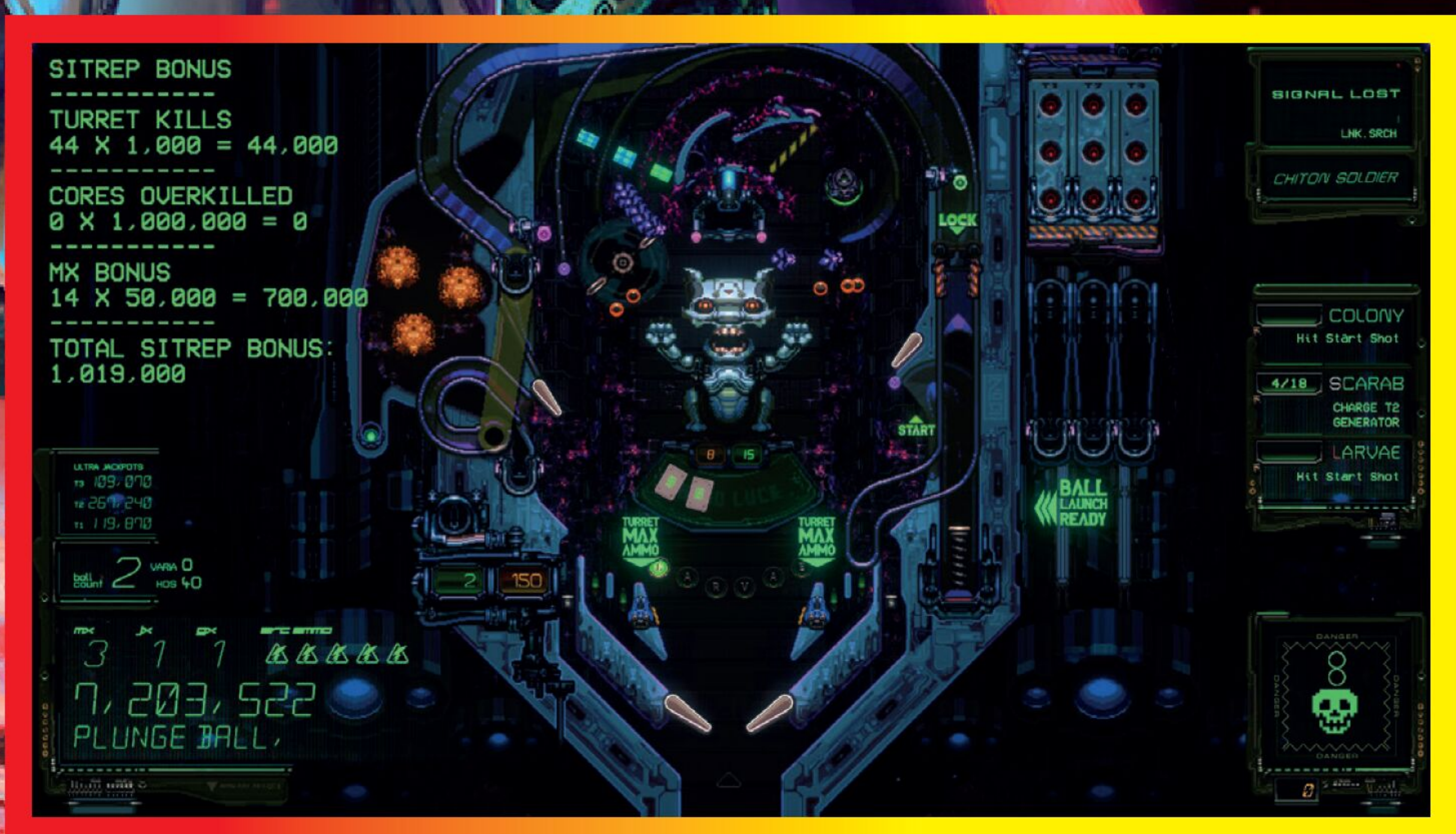
IN DECEMBER 2019, *DEMON'S TILT: OCCULT PINBALL ACTION* LAUNCHED ON STEAM TO VERY POSITIVE REVIEWS. ANDREW FISHER STARTS THE PROTOCOL TO REVIEW THE SCI-FI-THEMED SEQUEL IN EARLY ACCESS.

■ With the slogan **PINBALL NEVER DIES**, publishers FLARB LLC are hoping that lightning strikes twice with their newest pinball offering. It was Adam Ferrando (aka WIZNWAR) who, in 2017, started work on a pinball game inspired by classic 16-bit games (see **DEVILISHLY INSPIRED**). *Demon's Tilt* found favour with players for its chiptune-inspired soundtrack and fast-paced action. Now, we get the chance to take on a different beast.

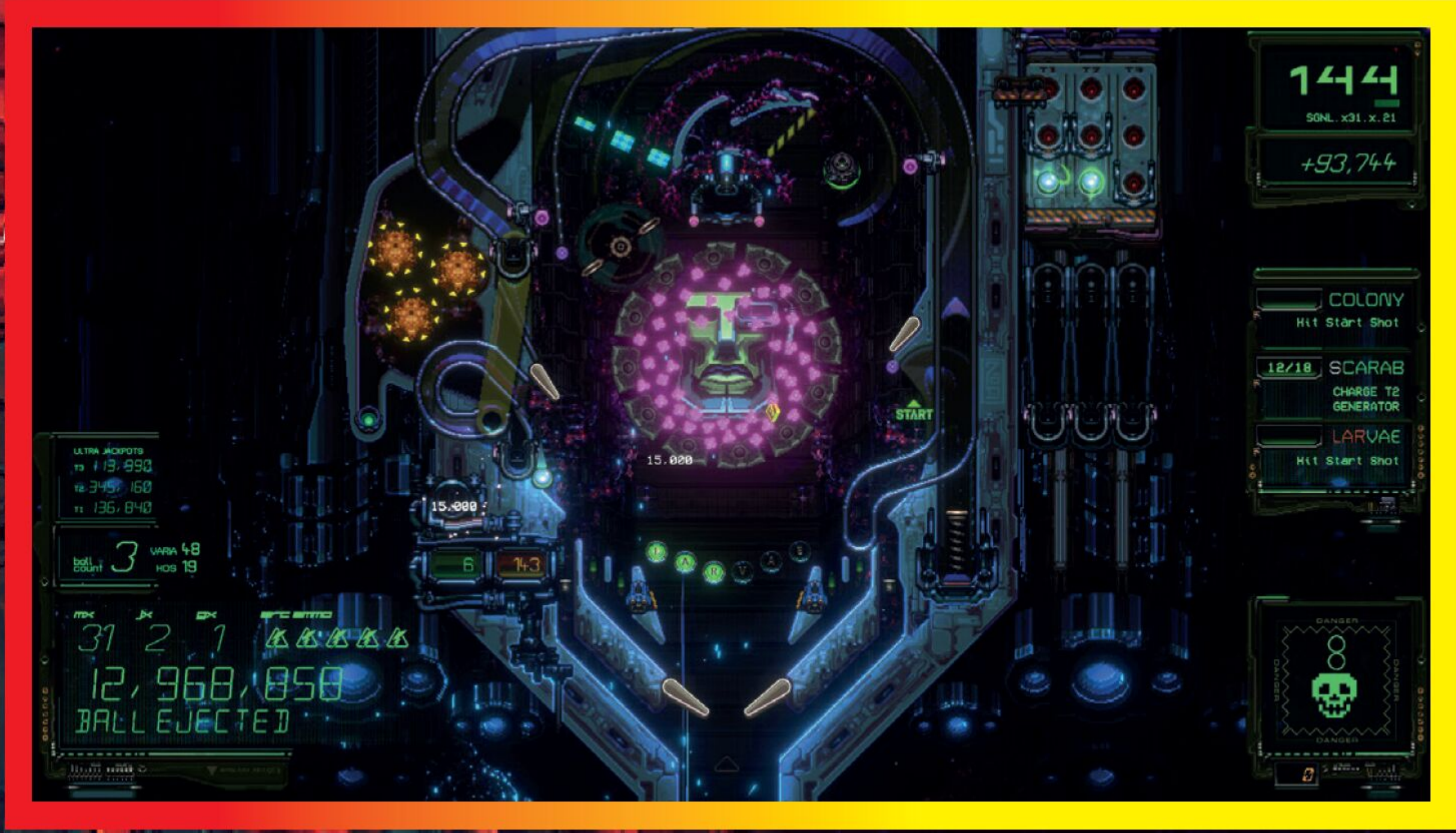
The massive scrolling table is over three screens high, with each section having its own flippers and a boss character. The top boss, with the female voice, reminds me of the classic *Bride of Pinbot*. The aim is to damage the bosses repeatedly so they change form. Doing enough damage reveals the boss's core, which can be damaged further to earn an Overkill bonus. Shooting specific targets will start a Protocol – this could be killing Scarabs or Larvae or destroying the Colonies. Killing enough of each type lights up a letter of the word itself in the status panel, building towards even more bonuses. As the Bosses take damage, they will fire off patterns of bullets – almost like a bullet hell shooter. These deflect the ball but award extra points; hitting the dropdown targets allows you to switch the bullet colour from purple to green and gold, racking up even higher bonuses.



Above: Earning Arc Ammo allows you to fire these purple Arc Lasers from your Turrets.



Above: Adding up bonus points after a ball has drained.



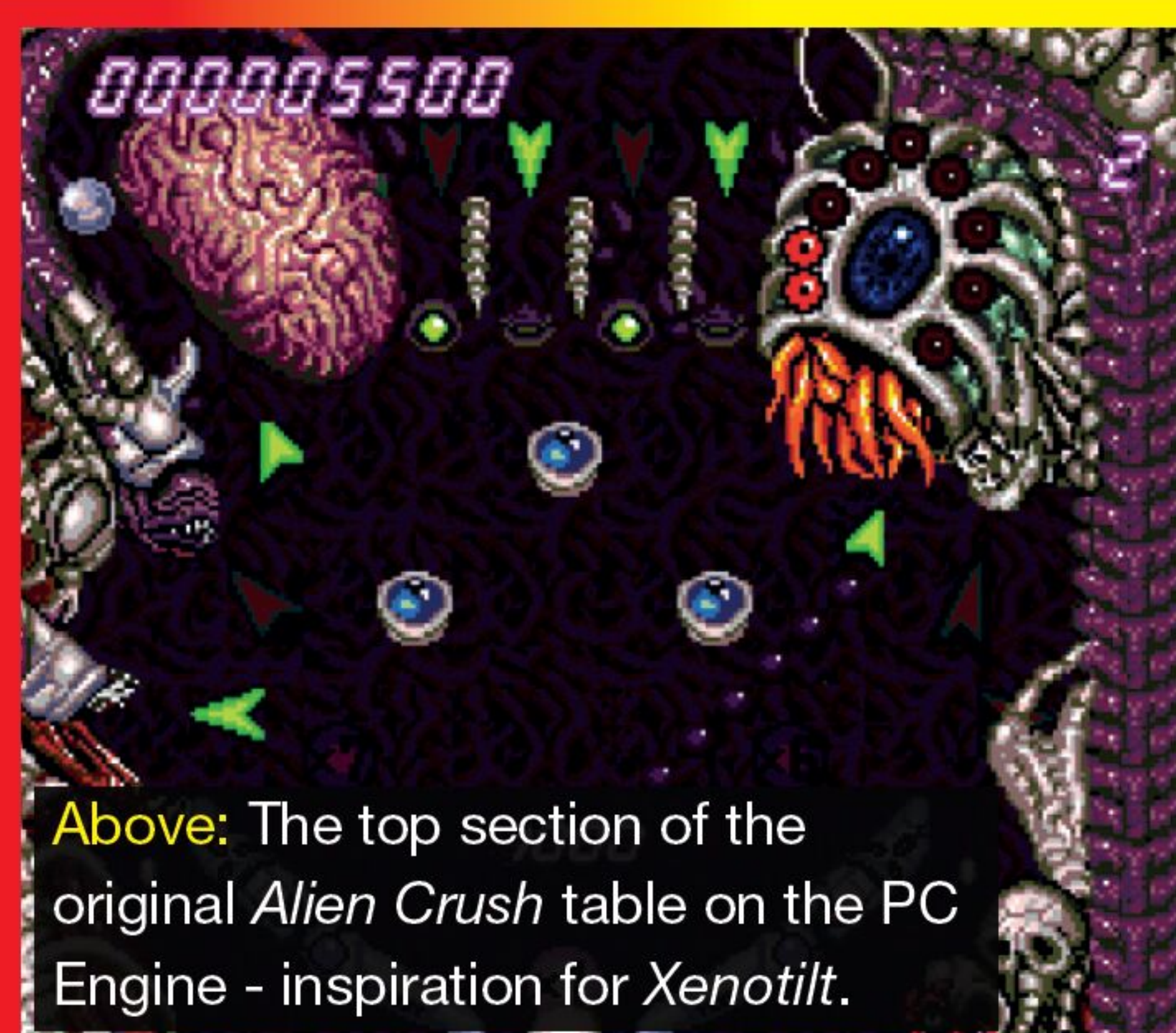
Above: Enemies and targets unleash spreads of bullets, much like a bullet hell shooter.

DEVILISHLY INSPIRED

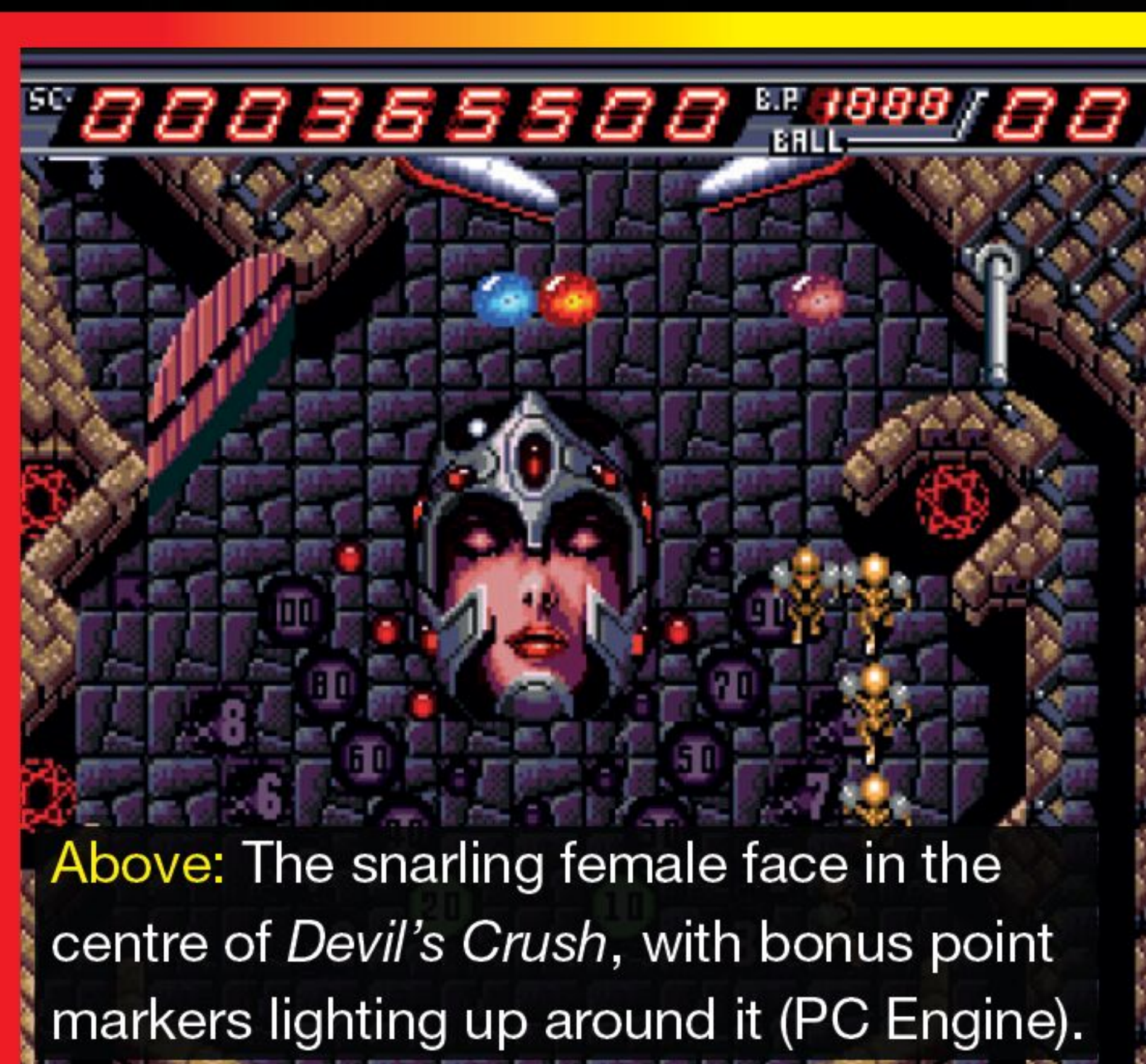
The original inspiration for the two Wizen games comes from the PC Engine. Developers Compile and publisher Naxat unleashed *Alien Crush* in 1988. It had a two-screen high table with a very organic Gigeresque look inspired by the *Alien* films. A pair of flippers were located at the bottom of each screen, with the player hitting targets and killing enemies with the ball. Hidden bonus rooms provided the opportunity to rack up even more points. *Alien Crush* was rereleased on the Wii's Virtual Console and PlayStation Network, as well as being one of the titles included on the CoreGrafx/TurboGrafx-16 Mini console.

The sequel, *Devil's Crush*, arrived in 1990. It had a more occult look, with the player battling skulls, skeletons, and demons. A smiling face in the centre of the larger three-screen high playfield transformed into a lizard as the ball hit it. Other additions included the alternating two-player mode and new bonus rooms. The North American release and the Mega Drive conversion toned down the occult symbolism and was reworked under the new title, *Dragon's Fury*.

The Japanese exclusive, *Jaki Crush*, appeared on the Super Famicom in 1992. The theme of this table was the Japanese representation of Hell and its "Jaki" demons. WiiWare remake, *Alien Crush Returns*, arrived in all territories in 2008 to mixed reviews.



Above: The top section of the original *Alien Crush* table on the PC Engine - inspiration for *Xenotilt*.

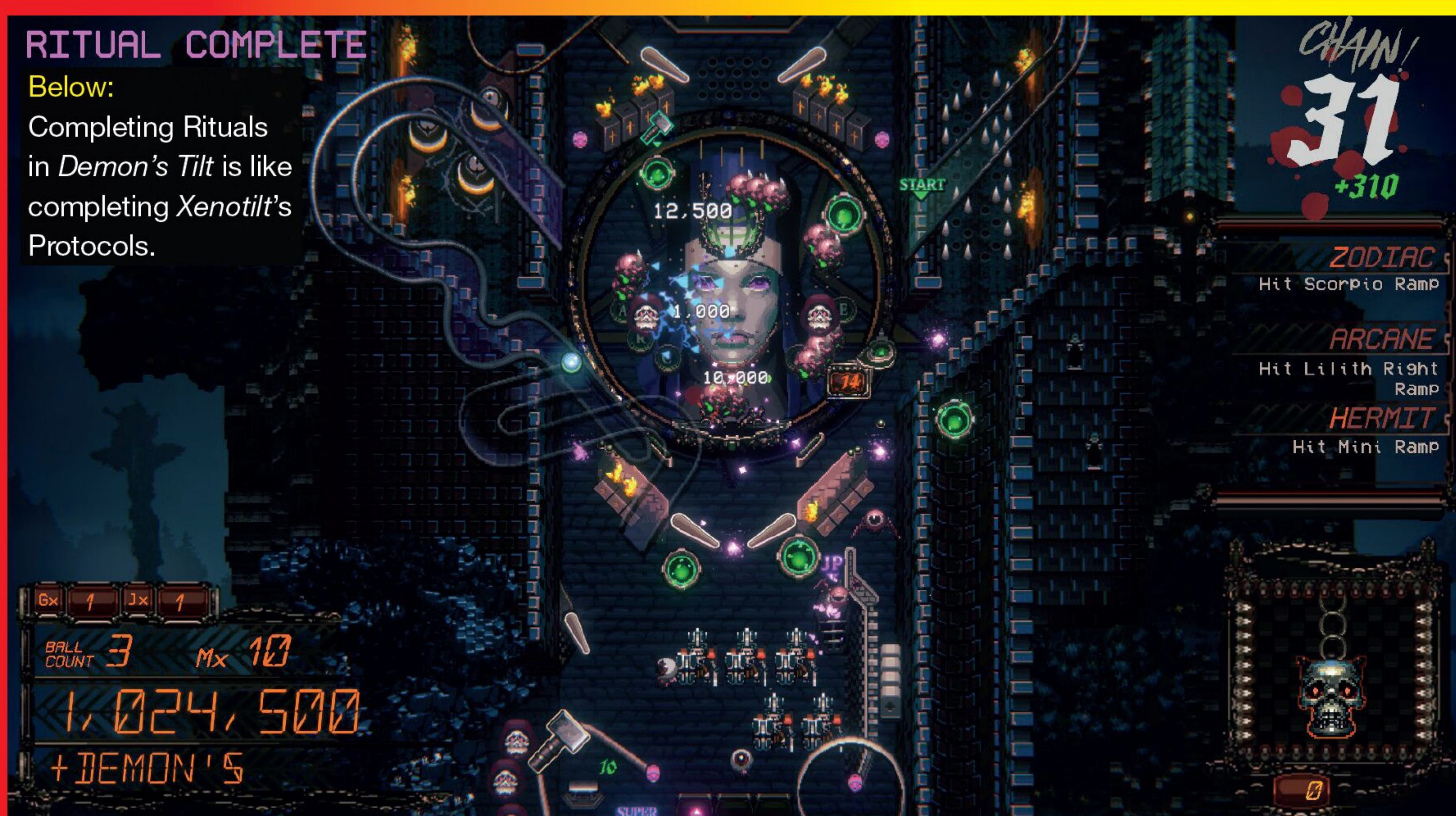


Above: The snarling female face in the centre of *Devil's Crush*, with bonus point markers lighting up around it (PC Engine).

RITUAL COMPLETE

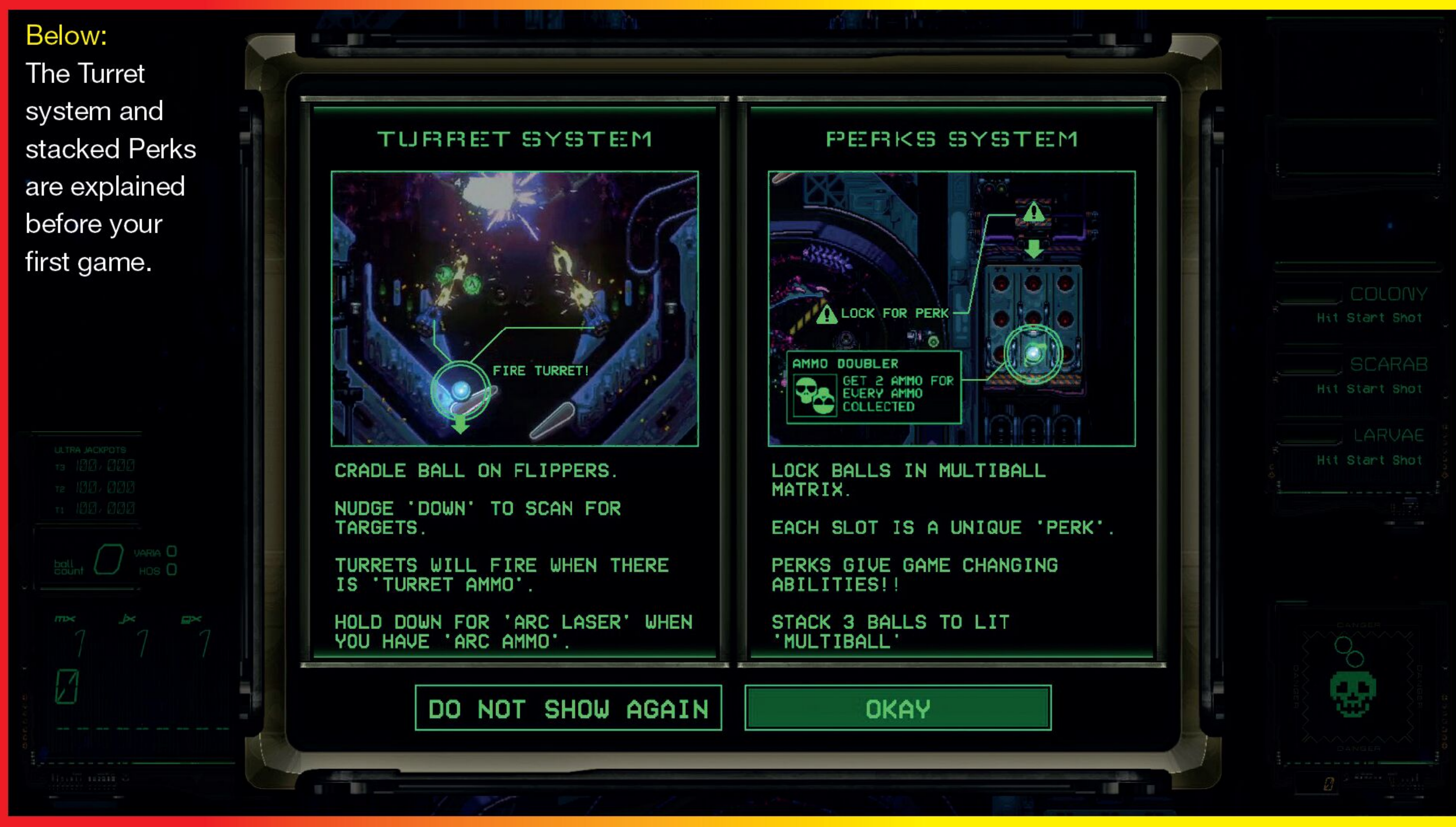
Below:

Completing Rituals in *Demon's Tilt* is like completing *Xenotilt's* Protocols.



Below:

The Turret system and stacked Perks are explained before your first game.



Learning to use the Nudge is essential, giving you better control over where the ball will land. Nudging is also critical to the new Turrets feature. Hitting targets fills the Turrets' ammo supply; cradling the ball on a flipper (by holding the left or right flipper control) and then nudging down fires the Turrets at nearby targets (including Larvae and Scarabs, depending on the section of the table). Hitting the A cards gives Arc Ammo instead, which offers Turrets the possibility of firing swirling purple lasers, which home in on targets to do even more damage.

Opening the Multiball Matrix and lifting a ball into it gives you two advantages. Stacking three balls in a row puts you into Multiball Mode for higher scores and absolute chaos, and each ball dropped into the Matrix gives an additional perk during the current ball. Certain targets, when energised, will also help lift the ball back up the table by teleporting it. The ball save feature, active at the start of each ball, does the same. But dropping the ball between the lowest set of flippers drains it, adding to the various bonuses earned so far.

Two modes of play are present in the Early Access build; Normal Mode gives three balls and full-sized flippers. Hardcore Mode gives you just one ball and 15% smaller flippers, making this mode suited to experienced

players. After each game, you are given a screen of post-match stats, showing how well you did with each ball and the bonuses earned. There are also Steam Achievements linked to in-game performance. Completing these in-game tasks also helps unlock extra features, such as the green-screen and amber monitor filters or additional in-game music.

Having thoroughly enjoyed *Demon's Tilt*, there was no way I was missing out on this sequel. The stylish graphics and table lighting look impressive, and the sheen of the metallic bosses is clever. I love the soundtrack, which feels like it is referencing the original *Crush* soundtracks with a chiptune ethos. The pace is high but slightly more manageable in Normal Mode. Hardcore is an excellent test of skill, though, and worth trying once you have put in a bit of time with the game. The incentive to get better is there with the online scoreboards and extras to unlock. *Xenotilt* is already a great pinball title in Early Access, so when the full version drops with extra modes and features, we can heartily recommend it. ■





FUSION

Game : Scott Pilgrim vs. The World: The Game

Year : 2010

System : Xbox 360, PS3, PC

Words : Ben Honebone

■ Nowadays, scrolling beat 'em-ups are all the rage. Games like *Streets of Rage IV*, *Final Vendetta*, or *TMNT: Shredder's Revenge* have joined the ranks of a seemingly endless supply of "modern-retro" brawlers looking to recapture the magic of the late 80s and 90s arcade classics. But back in 2010, Ubisoft were ahead of the curve when they created a scrapper based on the comic book and film *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*.

Featuring a beautifully detailed pixel-art style, *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World: The Game* successfully transfers the charm and character of artist Brian Lee O'Malley's comic book to a video game. Pilgrim's migration to consoles and PC is aided in no small part by the momentous chip-tune soundtrack by Anamanaguchi. Combining an eclectic comic book license with retro-styled graphics, gameplay, and boss-level chip tunes creates a magic formula that still impresses almost fourteen years later.

In keeping with "old school" gaming values, *Pilgrim* is a tough slog to complete. On your first attempt to defeat all of Ramona's evil ex-boyfriends, you'll realise that you're a bit of a weed. But fear not, an RPG-lite progression system in the form of shops found throughout the game's stages will allow you to steadily build Scott's punching power and add new moves to his arsenal. You can also play as the rest of Scott's band, Sex Bob-Omb, or as Scott's love interests, Ramona and Knives Chau. Focusing on one character to complete the main game will take some time, but maxing out all of the cast and unlocking two secret characters will take a real commitment.

If *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World: The Game* were released now, it would easily stand alongside the likes of *River City Girls* or *Double Dragon Gaiden: Rise of the Dragons*, with all the depth and challenge we've come to expect from a modern beat 'em-up. The original *Pilgrim* has long been de-listed from online stores, but fortunately, '*The Complete Edition*' was released at the beginning of this year, and it's available for just about everything. So, if you're a fan of all this punching and kicking and haven't played *Pilgrim* yet – I highly recommend it. ■



ARCADE1UP

ARCADES AT HOME

FOR AS LONG AS MOST OF US CAN REMEMBER, THE DREAM HAS BEEN TO OWN OUR OWN ARCADE MACHINES.

■ Some have been lucky enough to achieve this, buying original cabinets when their owners have decided to let them go. They're expensive though, and often out of reach for many of us. In recent years, however, alternative means have become available. Companies have been producing replica machines at fractions of the cost of an original arcade game, with the most prolific of these being Arcade 1UP. Three of the FUSION team got together to discuss the pros and cons of owning an Arcade 1UP machine.

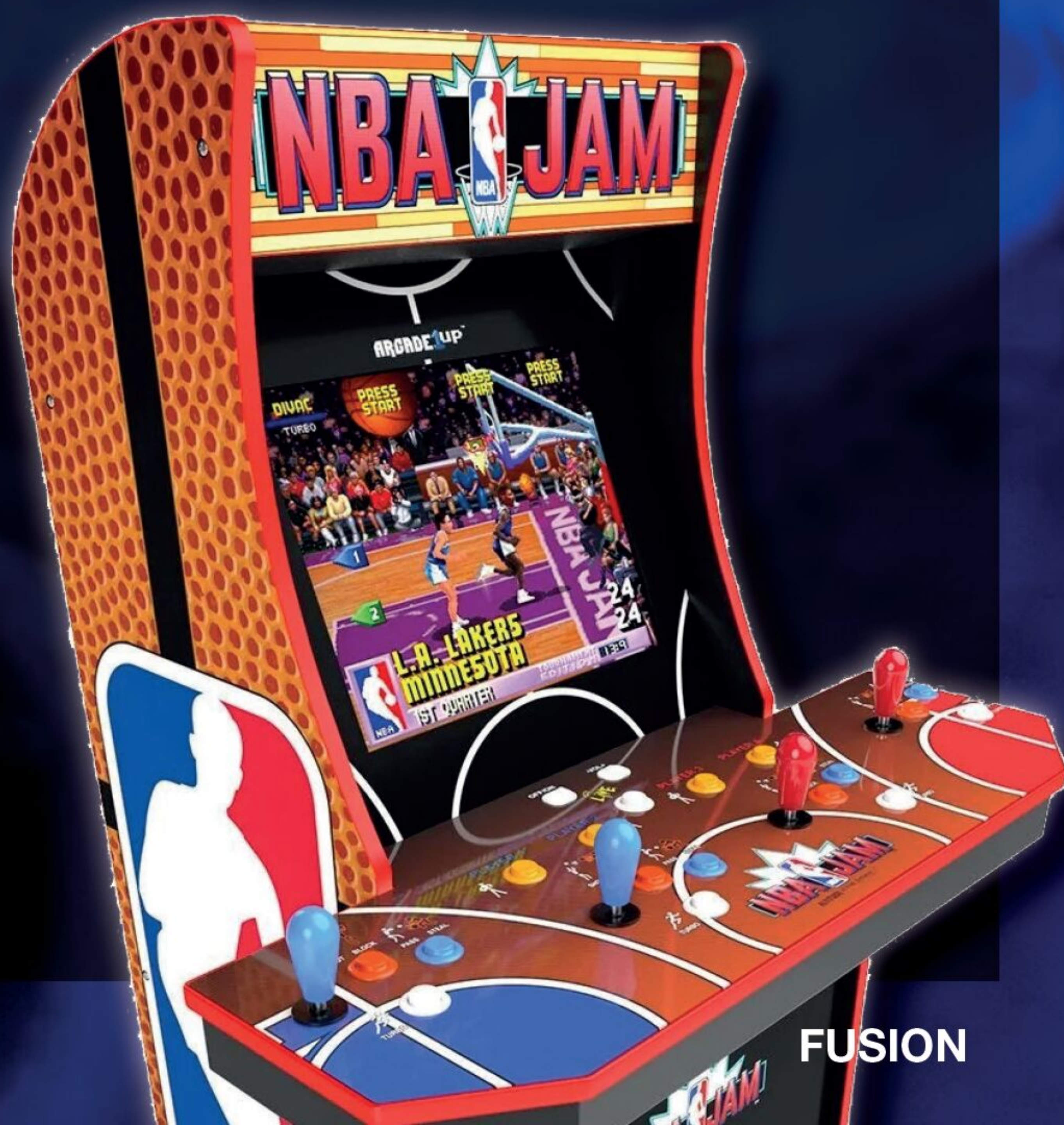
Paul Morrison: Greetings, fellow arcade owners! Welcome to the FUSION arcade discussion. I'd ask you if you'd brought plenty of tens, but of course we don't need them, as all our machines are set to free play! We all played arcade games as kids, but did either of you dream of owning an arcade machine before you got an Arcade 1UP machine?

Ben Honebone: I think I've wanted to own an arcade cabinet since I was a child, but I've never really had the space for one, and technically, I don't have the space for the two Arcade 1UPs I have now!

Paul Twist: I dreamt of owning an arcade cabinet ever since I was a child, but funds and space ensured that this would never become a reality for me.

PM: Yeah, I know what you mean. It was certainly a tight squeeze getting mine into its space! It's worth it, though. It's something I never thought I'd be able to own in any shape or form, despite wanting one for as long as I can remember.

BH: When I seriously considered getting a genuine arcade machine, the prices were terrifying, and I didn't fancy the maintenance challenges of thirty-year-old components. Also, the Arcade 1UP cabinets are very easy to mod with a Raspberry Pi, which opens up a host of other options if you are so inclined.



FUSION



Above: Unpacking and constructing Ben's extremely well packed *Killer Instinct* Arcade 1UP cabinet. It came all the way from Indiana in 4 days without a scratch on it.

PM: I'm not so inclined, as I'm hopeless with anything technical, but it's cool that people who enjoy fiddling about have scope to do so. The maintenance aspect always put me off too, but I remember being intrigued when the Arcade 1UP range was first announced and wondering if it might be my path to arcade ownership.

PT: I think I'd seen the range mentioned on social media, but hadn't taken much notice until I saw them on QVC, of all places!

BH: The *Space Invaders* cabinet got my attention first. But the *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition* cabinet piqued my interest because I'd spent a lot of time playing that particular machine when I was younger. I'm also a big *Street Fighter* fan.

PM: Yeah, there's definitely a lot of appeal in owning a *Space Invaders* machine, of any type. I guess I've been spoiled by the amount of choice because, for me, there wasn't enough variety for the price with that one. And yet, if you'd offered me a *Space Invaders* cabinet back in the day, I'd have snapped both your hands off. So why did you end up buying the cabinets you ended up with?

PT: *Pac-Man* is one of my all-time favourite games, and, following a stroke, I can only use one hand, which makes most arcade games a little tricky to play, but *Pac-Man* only requires the use of one hand. One night, just before Christmas, my wife and I had QVC on the TV, and the *Pac-Man* Arcade 1UP cabinet was the "Today's Special Value" offer. I remarked to my wife that it looked cool, so she asked me if I fancied it as a Christmas present. And after a little deliberation, I decided that I did!

PM: If ever there was a way to find a silver lining to a situation, that could be it. Nothing gets in the way of our love of gaming!

BH: The 2020 lockdown is largely responsible for giving me the time to think about it long enough to buy one. I probably wouldn't have gotten so distracted by the idea if almost everything else in the world hadn't stopped. To be honest, owning the cabs feels a little decadent.

PM: I agree with you in a way. I couldn't really justify getting one of these if it was just for me. However, I've always known that my wife's two favourite arcade games are *Centipede* and

Galaga, and I knew that if there was a good opportunity to get one of those, then I'd go for it. GAME happened to have the *Centipede* Legacy cabinet on sale last Christmas, so I bit the bullet, and now we have an arcade machine that the whole family enjoys. Having said that, I'm terrible at DIY, and when I unpacked it and read the build instructions, I was crestfallen!

BH: I found the construction very straightforward and very enjoyable. I've built four Arcade 1UPs in total (three *SFII* cabinets and *Killer Instinct*), and it's always been a smooth process with no missing parts. In fact, I make the build last as long as possible because you only get the experience once. It's such an extravagant purchase that I must squeeze every last drop of enjoyment out of the process.

PT: As mentioned earlier, I can only use one hand, so building the cabinet was a bit beyond my abilities. Luckily, my wife was happy to oblige, and assembly seemed pretty straightforward.

PM: Must admit, that makes me feel a bit pathetic. I got the thing half-built, then hit a sticking point and it lay on its side, unfinished, for almost a week before I built up the resolve to tackle it again. Even then, I had a couple of potential disasters. Having said that, I did feel a great deal of satisfaction once I had it up and running. Maybe now I can tackle the kitchen table and chairs I bought, but haven't built...

PT: I do have one regret with regards to building

the cabinet: we threw away the brackets to affix the cabinet to a wall, as we were renting our flat and prohibited from fixing things to the walls, and this seemed unlikely to change at the time. However, we were unexpectedly able to buy our flat a few months later, and if I'd kept the brackets I would like to affix my cabinet to a wall now.

PM: I haven't done that either, or built the riser. I was put off by the large "CAUTION: MAY CAUSE DEATH!" warning in the instructions. I'm just happy to have it built and working! Now that you have them, what's your favourite thing about having them in your house?

BH: Playing them, obviously. But simply turning them on and having the ambience of the attract modes fill the house is just as much fun. It might indicate that I grew up in a place with plenty of arcade machines, replicating that intoxicating feeling of nostalgia. They also look great!

PT: It gives me the chance to (almost) have an arcade cabinet in my home when I wouldn't have room for an actual full-sized cabinet! Dream (almost) come true! And it looks pretty cool!

PM: It is really cool to be able to immerse yourself into an arcade experience any time you feel like it. And I third the opinion that it looks cool! On the flip side, do you think there are any negatives to these machines?

Below: Completing the *Killer Instinct* build (with its fancy replica coin door) and Paul Twist's *Pac-Man* countercade.





Above: Paul Morrison's *Centipede* Legacy Arcade 1UP cabinet (also with fancy replica coin door).

PT: If we're honest, the cost per game is pretty astronomical compared to just buying a download for a console or using emulators (but it's worth it!).

BH: The quality of some components, while perfectly functional, could be better. The joysticks and buttons are my bugbears. They feel cheap and perform likewise. I've replaced the controls on several cabinets, which makes a big difference. Also, the screens on earlier models are prone to dead pixels, and I've seen them pop up on various machines. The newer models, like *Killer Instinct* and *Marvel Vs Capcom II*, appear to have better quality screens.

PM: I haven't really noticed that, although my cabinet doesn't have a joystick... I suppose when you point it out, the buttons aren't top notch, but I've never had any problems with them.

PT: One temporary downside for me was that *Pac-Man 99* launched on Switch not long after I got my *Pac-Man* Arcade 1UP cabinet, so I didn't play on it much at first, as I was spending all my *Pac-Man* time on the Switch!

PM: Ahhh well, at least your cabinet wasn't going anywhere, so you could enjoy it when you were ready! Are there any other games you'd seriously consider buying if they were added to the Arcade 1UP range?

PT: To be honest, probably not, due to lack of space in my home and only using one hand. If I had more space and could use both hands, I'd be all over *TMNT*, *Simpsons*, and *Crude Buster* Arcade 1UP cabinets, as these are the games I have the fondest memories of playing in arcades as a child.

BH: *Killer Instinct* was the "dream cabinet" for me, so it would be impossible to top that. However, I'd love to see them tackle *Stun Runner*, *Operation Wolf*, or *House of the Dead*.

PM: Great choices from both of you – I feel that if they replicated more non-standard cabinets, like those you've mentioned, they'd do very well. Then again, my personal choices are all standards! I'd love a *Kung-Fu Master* cabinet, but I'd also find it hard to resist *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* or *Star Force*. Consider this article a plea for more cabinets! That said, there is a school of thought among some that you should either own original cabinets or do without, and some feel that the Arcade 1UP range are "not worthy" of the scene. What are your thoughts on this?

PT: This is the reason I didn't immediately respond with a "yes" when asked if I wanted the cabinet, but ultimately, I knew it'd bring me a lot of fun, and for me, that's what gaming is all about, and is much more important than being a purist.

BH: Elitism and gatekeeping are two of the biggest problems with niche scenes and hobbies people are passionate about. Someone will always disagree with or outright despise your outlook on things. The important thing is that you are happy and able to play the games you want in a way that you're comfortable with. If that means using emulation and "pretend" arcade



Above: Ben's two Arcade 1UP cabinets: stock *Killer Instinct* and a modded *Street Fighter II CE*, currently occupying a space that could be used for all manner of other, more useful things, like seats [I sold the modded *RoboCop* cabinet in 2021 - Ed].

cabinets, so be it.

PT: I know that emulating via the likes of Raspberry Pi is cheaper, more convenient, and more flexible, but I've always dreamt of having my very own arcade cabinet, and the Arcade 1UP range is close enough for me!

BH: Nothing compares to a real arcade machine, but owning and maintaining one doesn't suit my lifestyle or finances. I'm happy with the next best thing, and it makes it extra special when I visit an actual arcade.

PM: For my part, I totally agree. It's a more accessible way to bring an arcade experience into the home, legitimately. It's better than buying, say, *Capcom Arcade Stadium* on your PS4, in terms of the way you get to play the games, but of course, it's far more expensive and you don't get as many games. Really, you need to want an arcade machine and not just the ability to play the games. I'd say anyone who's had a hankering for an arcade machine, doesn't mind the construction element of it, and has the spare cash should consider it.

BH: An Arcade 1UP is no replacement for a genuine vintage arcade cabinet, but it's usually cheaper and easier to maintain than the real thing. If you want 100% authenticity, an Arcade 1UP is definitely not for you. However, if you want a three-quarter-scale arcade machine that looks great and has a lot of options for modding and upgrading, it's probably your best option.

PT: Owning an actual arcade cabinet is beyond the means of most of us, but Arcade 1UP offers the next best thing! Stuff the purists, Arcade 1UP cabinets look cool, and they're a lot of fun! Do keep hold of the wall-mounting brackets though, even if you don't intend to wall-mount it at first - that's a lesson I learned the hard way!

PM: I think it's fair to say there are more upsides than downsides when it comes to owning one of these. We've all had lots of enjoyment from ours, and will continue to do so. If you have a strong nostalgic affection for any of the cabinets in the Arcade 1UP range, and you're not a purist, then you could do a lot worse than get yourself one of these. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to set a new high score on *Tempest*. ■

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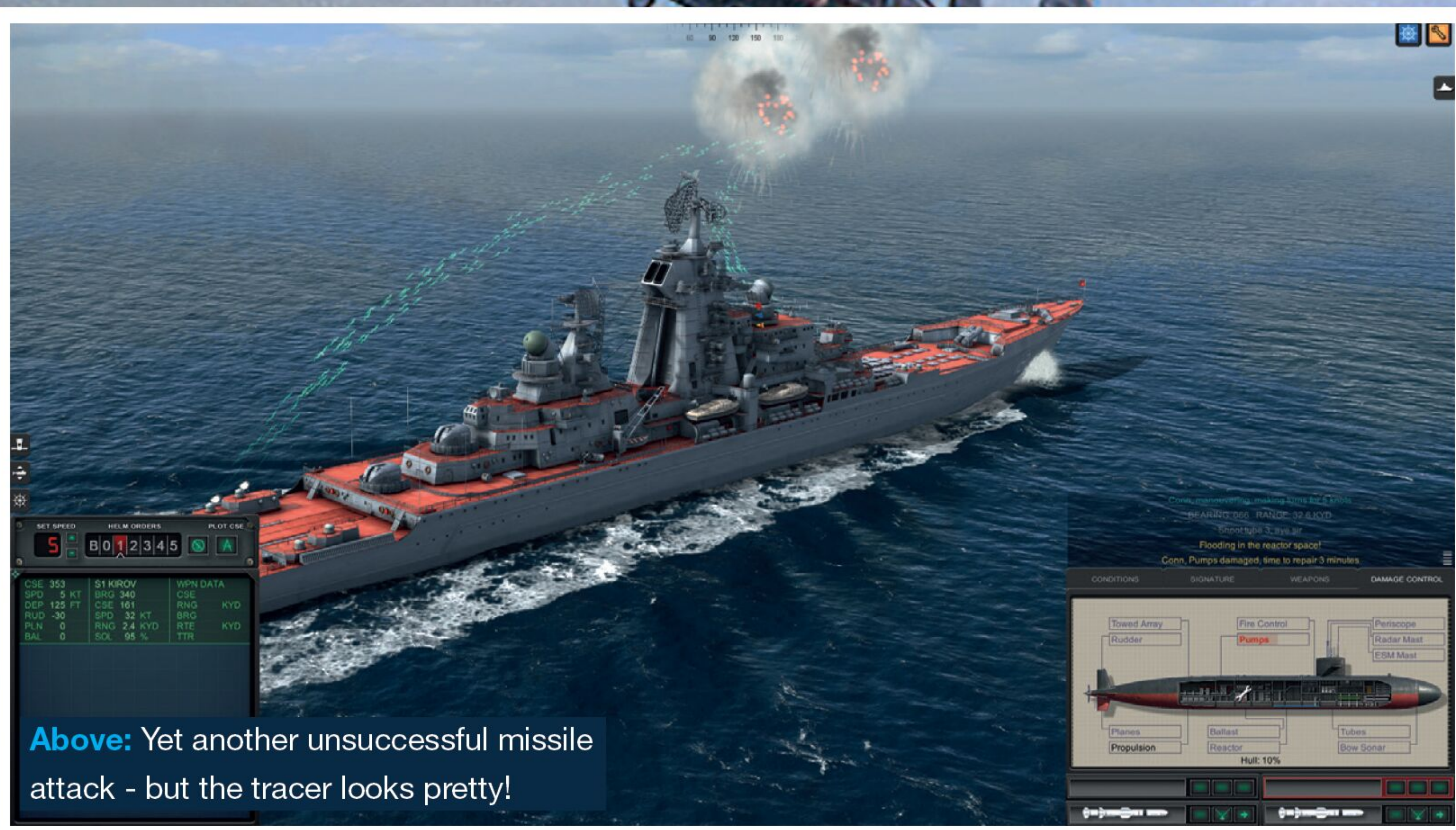
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MORE DETAILS COMING SOON



Above: Yet another unsuccessful missile attack - but the tracer looks pretty!

COLD WATERS

■ In 1988, *Red Storm Rising* from Microprose set the standard for military simulations featuring nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs). *688 Attack Sub* (1989) and *SSN-21 Seawolf* (1994) traded in realism for a more immediate action-heavy style. However, nearly thirty years later, Killerfish Games stepped up with what they described as the spiritual successor to *Red Storm Rising: Cold Waters*.

Giving you the conn of an American SSN, *Cold Waters* certainly doesn't lack for content. Alongside several training scenarios, you have the option of undertaking eight single

missions as well as three campaigns. The training missions are essential unless you like your learning curves to be vertical, although it has to be said that they prepare you nicely for the challenges ahead. The latter campaigns are more varied than you'd think - the North Atlantic in 1968 forces you to rely upon short-range and often straight-running torpedoes. The 1984 campaign gives you more advanced toys but ramps up the threat, but the 2000 South China Sea theatre is possibly the most dangerous of all. Everyone's kit is pretty good in 2000, but you're stuck in shallow waters that often limit your ability to hide or manoeuvre. Finally, if you get bored or want to experiment with the game, there is a mission builder where you can tinker to your heart's content.

As you tootle about in your SSN, you'll



Above: The birthday barbecue at sea had gotten out of hand [Been there - Ed].

COLD WATERS

WORDS BY ANDREW OYSTON

spend most of your time with the tactical map. You can do almost everything from there, and the relatively clean interface balances functionality with simplicity. Shortcut keys allow you to switch to the well-modelled 3D graphics to view the action as it happens. The game's look does justice to the subject, and the 40-plus classes of ships and subs are nicely done without unnecessarily stressing your graphics card - even 4K on a venerable GTX1060 is doable. Some might consider the damage models to be a bit limited, but when you're neck deep in Soviet anti-submarine forces, eye candy will be the last thing on your mind. There's also a useful time compression option for those periods when you're waiting for something to happen.

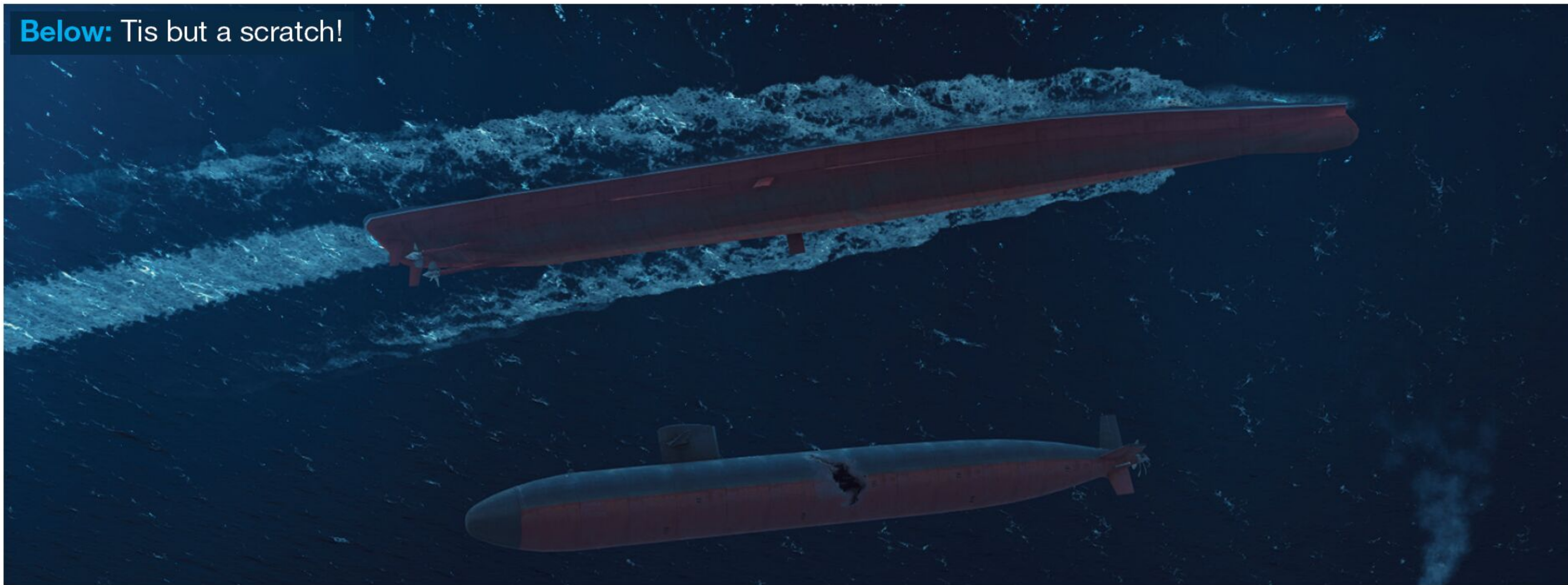
Where *Cold Waters* really excels is in its

audio design. The music is suitably atmospheric and hauntingly ominous in-game as you slowly approach your target. Sonar sounds are also well realised, and it's difficult not to panic as the higher-pitched pings of approaching torpedoes become more rapid as they close in on your boat.

Passive sonar is handled well also, as you'll need to classify each contact as it's detected manually. The process is straightforward, and it is best to keep your speed down as your ability to listen is hampered by flow noise from your passage through the water. Target identification is also essential to ascertain your opponents' capabilities and not shoot any passing whales!

On the subject of shooting, choosing the right weapons for the job is essential. As noted above, earlier periods had the most simplistic

Below: Tis but a scratch!



KNOW YOUR TARGETS

Alexa, show me the definition of a missile ship, crammed with anti-air, ant-ship and anti-sub defences. Its weakness is that hitting it anywhere will make something explosive go bang.



Udaloy Class Frigate

Dedicated anti-sub ships were a sign that it was no more Mr. Nice Guy for NATO SSNs. Well-equipped and handy in a fight, these became the ocean-going workhorses of the Soviet Navy.



Kirov Class Battlecruiser

Missile business at the front, helicopter party at the back. Designed to support Soviet missile subs in defensive bastions, they were reported to be very poor sea boats.



Moskva Class Helicopter Carrier (AKA The Mullet Class)



weapons, and it's no good firing straight-running torpedoes at a submarine. Similarly, guided weapons at the time were very short-ranged, but the hi-tech of the 1980s and 2000s didn't help either. The introduction of sub-launched surface-to-surface missiles might offer you stand-off attacks, but air defences have also improved.

Cold Waters portrays the nature of submarine warfare very well. The various scenarios demand deep thought and consideration, and factors such as thermal layers, surface conditions, and the time of day will help or hinder you accordingly. Once the weaponry is loose, you're likely to find the opposing forces unhappy with the situation, and your evasion skills



will be sorely tested, punishingly so on the higher difficulties. If you don't know much about submarine tactics, the manual is a great help, whilst the in-game reference section will tell you all you need to know about the hardware.

There was obviously a demand for a game like *Cold Waters* when it was first released, and judging by the sheer number of YouTube videos featuring the title, it's been well-received. Mods have also been popular, with the Royal Navy getting a look in and even a (very) unofficial United Earth Oceans pack detailing boats and the like from the 90s sci-fi show *SeaQuest DSV*. Thankfully, it lacks a talking dolphin, so that's a massive plus point.

Cold Waters does what it needs to do very well. If you're a military-sim fan, you must try this out. ■



**FAITH JOHNSON TACKLES
TAITO'S LATEST BUNDLE OF
COIN-MUNCHING ARCADE
CLASSICS RELEASED
EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE SWITCH.**

■ The Switch has become a go-to console for retro gamers as collection after collection of classic titles is released. The latest is the second collection of arcade games from Taito. Like the first collection, it takes ten classics from the arcade and adds simple quality-of-life features such as save states and difficulty options.

For several reasons, reviewing a collection of arcade ports like this can be hard. Firstly, it covers many genres, so there will likely be a game or two you're not interested in. Secondly, it has games from different arcade eras, spanning the mid-80s to the mid-90s, which will appeal to differing groups.

So, with that in mind, the headline is that *Taito Milestones II* controls well, has some great options to customise each game, and has enough variety to please most gamers. For this

review, we decided to rate each game on its own merits and then calculate the average to give an overall score for the collection.

THE NEWZEALAND STORY (1988)

A bonafide classic in its own right, *The NewZealand Story* is probably the best title on this compilation. The platforming is tough and tight; there is a variety of enemies to destroy, and it's satisfying to ping your bow to clear the way to the level goal.

It starts off quite simple and gives you a chance to gain vital experience with the straight-forward yet frantic mechanics. Once you get beyond the first ten levels, the challenge ramps up, taking all your skills to finish. The graphics are bright and brilliant, and the level design is outstanding. **9/10**

KIKI KAIKAI (1986)

The first of several Japanese exclusives seeing their first Western release thanks to this collection, *Kiki Kaikai* is a top-down action title set in feudal Japan. Enemies come from all sides,



Above: (clockwise from top left) *The New Zealand Story*, *Darius II*, *Kiki Kaikai*, *Gun Frontier*, *Ben Bero Beh*, and *The Legend of Kage*.

and you must be alert as the action never stops. Each level ends with a powerful boss that can be frustrating to beat.

The gameplay is quite fun at first but soon becomes repetitive, as do the graphics, and it feels unfairly hard in places. There is little satisfaction beyond the first few levels, and only hardcore arcade fans will want to get through to the very end. **6/10**

DARIUS II (1989)

Featuring the uncommon three-screen version, *Darius II* is a sight to behold as it sprawls across the entire screen. Those who have never played the three-screen arcade cab will love having this version on their Switch. It's grueling, unfair, and filled with waves of impenetrable enemies, but it's *Darius*!

It's the definitive version of this shooter classic and plays excellently in this collection. It may be difficult for casual shmup fans, but it will keep you coming back time and again. The

graphics pop on the Switch, and you can turn the difficulty down. **9/10**

GUN FRONTIER (1990)

It wouldn't be a Taito collection without a few shooters, and *Gun Frontier* is the second one on show here. It is a vertical scroller that uses every trope in the Shmup book to create a solid blasting experience without doing anything new.

The graphics are great, and the controls are tight, but it's a forgettable game once you finish it. That's not to say it's not worth your time, just that Taito kept things safe. Shmup fans will enjoy setting this to tate mode and aiming for that 1cc finish. *Gun Frontier* is an accomplished shooter.

7/10

BEN BERO BEH (1984)

It may be its age or very quirky mechanics, but this Japanese exclusive misses the mark. Being the first Western release of this title, you play as Dami-chan as he battles to put out fires in apartment blocks.

The controls feel muddled, and poor

collision detection and frustrating gameplay mechanics put out the fun flames more than the building's fires. This one is worth playing as a curio of Japanese arcade history, but not one you'll want to see through to the end. **5/10**

The Legend of Kage (1985)

Critiquing this one is difficult because the gameplay has not aged well. However, the graphics and tough challenge make it a game you'll want to see more of once you get your first Game Over. You play as a ninja, taking on swarms of ever-spawning other ninjas and swordsmen.

The aim is to get through each stage without dying, and it's very tough right from the outset. However, once you learn the mechanics, you can see how this influenced other arcade games such as *Shinobi*. It's worth a play-through, even to test your arcade skills. **7/10**

Liquid Kids (1990)

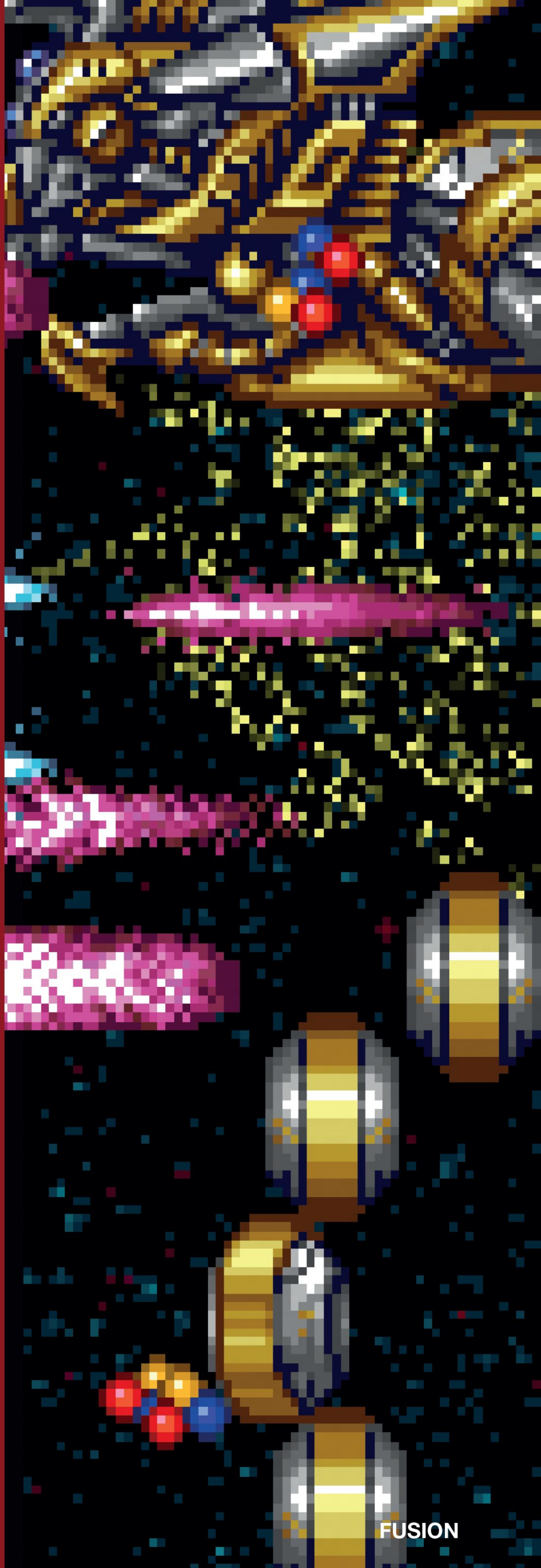
A spiritual successor of the *Bubble Bobble* series, *Liquid Kids* is one of the standout titles in this collection. Featuring beautifully bright and bold pixel art and solid platform action, this is a classic that more gamers should've played back in the day.

The mechanics are well thought out, and you have many ways to dispose of enemies. While it's not the toughest arcade game, it's certainly a tidal wave of fun. The overall presentation is excellent, and this is a great way to introduce younger gamers to arcade classics from Japan. **8/10**

Solitary Fighter (1991)

Better known as *Violent Fight* in the West, this one features gloriously large sprites that almost fill the screen. A cross between a one-on-one fighter and a beat 'em-up, *Solitary Fighter* is centred around a 1950s underground fighting tournament.

You fight in small arenas and must beat your opponent to progress. The controls sometimes feel clunky, but the gameplay picks up once you learn the nuances of the moves and some of the





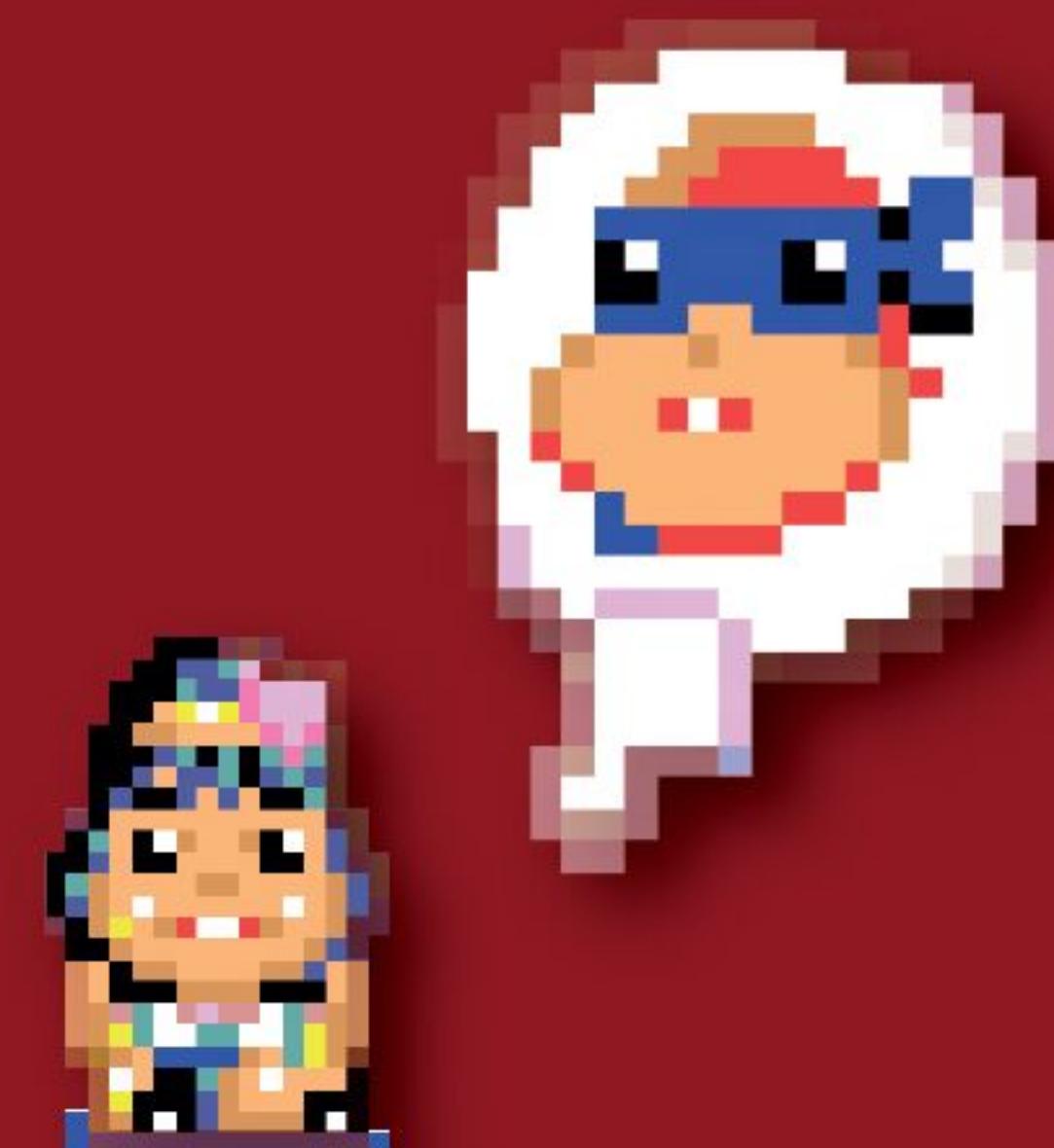
advanced techniques. It's not a classic, but one to bust out with two players on a Friday night gaming session. **7/10**

Dinorex (1992)

There aren't enough games about dinosaurs, and if *Dinorex* is anything to go by, you may understand why. This game is woeful in every regard. You pick a giant dinosaur that battles with other giant dinosaurs in an arena. It sounds fantastic, like Jurassic Park meets *Street Fighter II*, except it isn't.

From the awful animation to the unresponsive controls, *Dinorex* is to be avoided and is

Page Left: *Metal Black*.
Top Left: *Solitary Fighter*.
Bottom Left: *Dinorex*.
Below: *Liquid Kids*.



the worst game in this collection. It might be worth playing for a laugh and to see some arcade history, but no arcade gamer can take this Tyrannosaurus dung pile seriously. **5/10**

Metal Black (1991)

In true arcade tradition, the last game on the list is a shmup, and a decent one at that. *Metal Black* feels a little dated by today's standards, but it has a cool style and intriguing gameplay mechanics that make it one to try and finish.

Hardcore shmup fans will appreciate the difficulty and unique graphics, while newcomers will enjoy the slower pace and generally simple weapon system. There is also an interesting bonus round every few levels, a unique feature in arcade shooters at the time. **7/10**

So, there you have it, ten Taito games that showcase a variety of genres and eras in arcade gaming. Overall, *Taito Milestones II* is a worthy addition to any retro gamer's Switch collection and is available now for digital download or as a physical cart from Inin Games. ■





FUSION



Game : Resident Evil Village Gold Edition
Year : 2022
System : PC, Switch, PS4/5, Xbox One/Series
Words : Ben Honebone

■ After eight mainline games, four remakes, and numerous spin-offs, you'd think we'd be sick of the *Resident Evil* series by now. But we're not. Switching the series' staple third-person viewpoint to a first-person one in 2017 was a bold but wholly successful move. While I can't deny the brilliance of *Resident Evil VII: Biohazard*, I wasn't a fan of the first-person perspective. When the sequel, *Resident Evil Village*, was announced, I was dismayed at the return of the same viewpoint. But, a little over a year later, I finally got what I wanted: *Resident Evil Village Gold Edition* – with third-person mode!

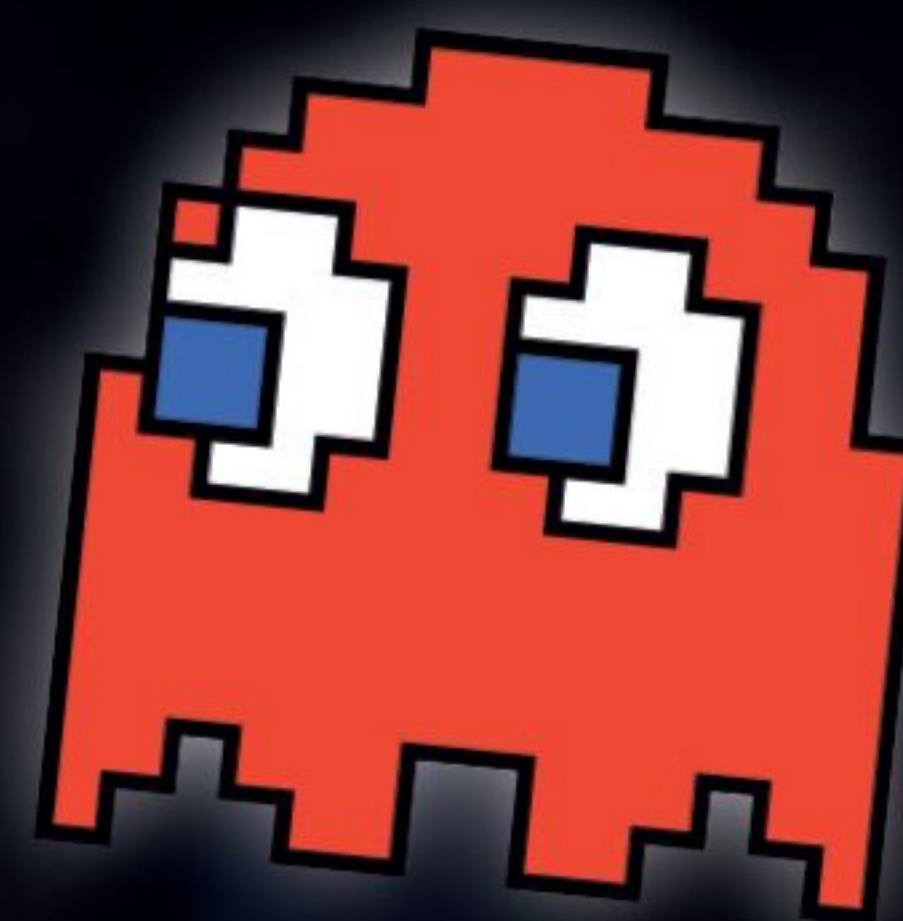
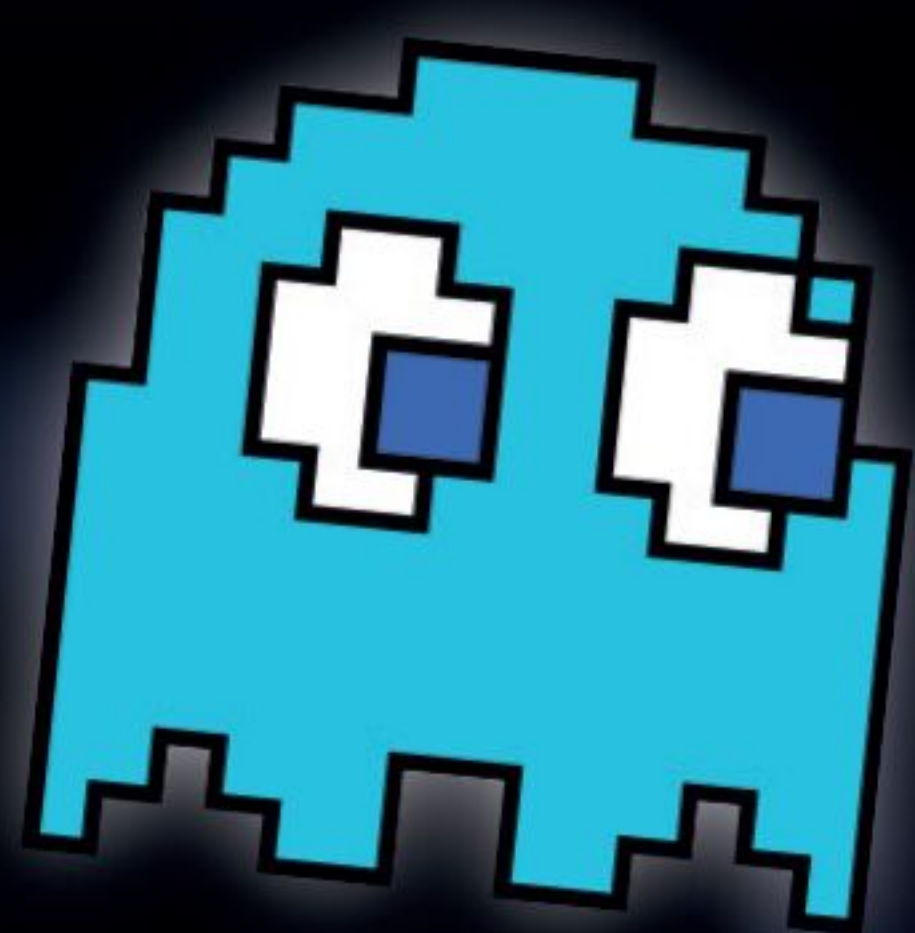
Playing through *Village* (twice) has been a joy, not only because I can now enjoy it from the perspective I'm accustomed to but also because it's a classic, meat-and-potatoes *Resident Evil* game. There is no denying that *Village*'s gameplay owes a lot to *Resident Evil IV* (Capcom was developing the remake simultaneously). But, the story, map, and enemies are sufficiently unique in their identity to avoid anything that feels too derivative. *Village* brilliantly fulfils its role as a direct sequel to *Resident Evil VII* by expanding on the events behind the biohazard at the Baker House in an inventive and engaging way. Chris Redfield returns as a more central character in *Village*'s narrative after appearing at the end of the previous game, and this version of one of *Resident Evil*'s original protagonists is perhaps the best that Capcom has ever created.

While *Village* offers its fair share of shambling, half-dead aggressors, armoured lycans, and giant bosses, it also features one of the most uncomfortable scares in the entire series – House Beneviento. On the southwest outskirts of the map lies this classic haunted house that you must investigate in your quest to save your baby daughter, Rose. However, deep in the basement of House Beneviento, you'll get more baby than you bargained for when the power is shut off and a huge deformed fetus with a vacuous, gaping mouth stalks you, dragging its bloody umbilical cord behind it. A very unpleasant game of cat-and-mouse (man-and-baby?) ensues as you attempt to avoid the horrific tyke, restore power, and escape via a lift. 'Baby' is undoubtedly one of the most disturbing, disgusting and memorable biohazards that Capcom has ever dreamt up. Finally making it into the lift as Baby approached, crying and screaming, "DA-DAAA!" is an experience I will not soon forget. ■

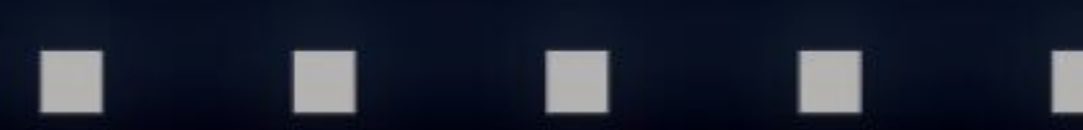
PAC-MAN™

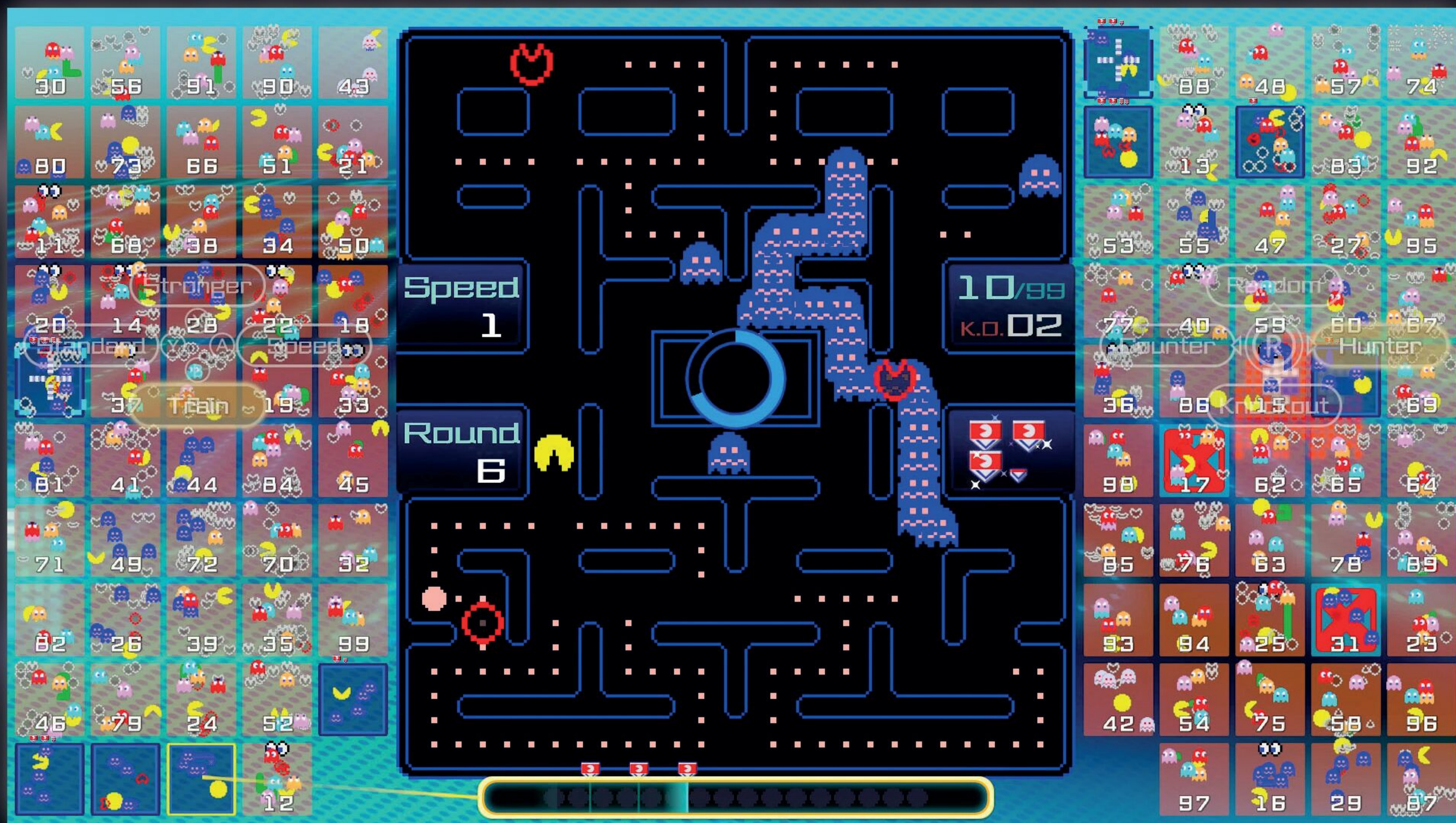
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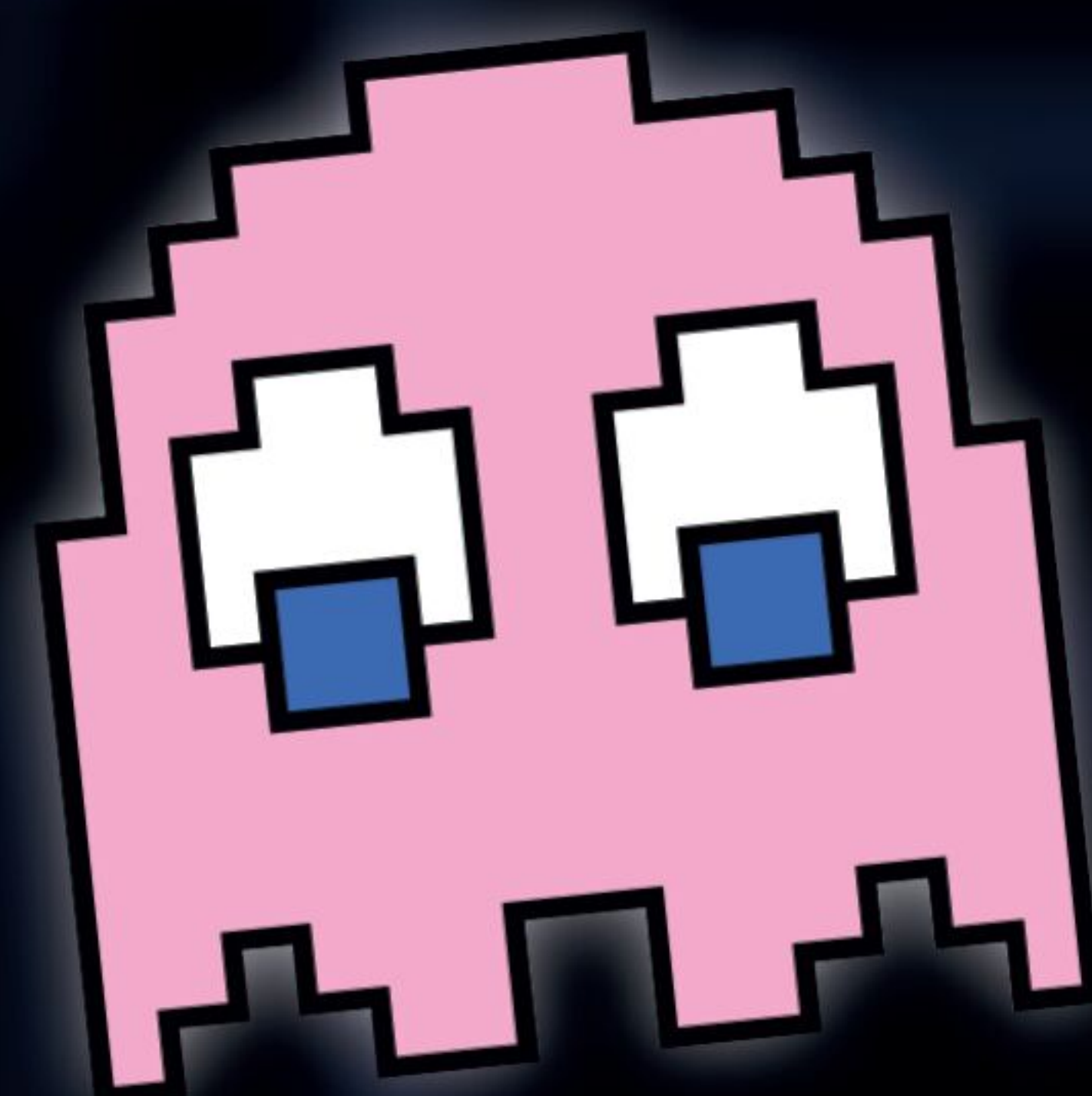
PAUL TWIST DRAPES A BLACK SHEET
WITH TWO CUT-OUT EYE HOLES OVER
HIS HEAD TO MOURN THE PASSING
OF *PAC-MAN* 99 APPROPRIATELY.





“It started with *Tetris*, never thought it would come to this”, as Hot Chocolate’s Errol Brown might have sung if he’d owned a Nintendo Switch and hadn’t sadly passed away in 2015. Anyway, Errol Brown would’ve been right. The first classic game to receive a 99-player reimaging on the Nintendo Switch was *Tetris 99* in 2019. It was followed by *Super Mario Bros. 35*, which saw a reduction to 64 players but still had the same basic idea: a classic from gaming’s past released in a new online multiplayer battle royale format for subscribers to Nintendo Switch Online.

Playing these classics with other players from all over the globe breathed new life into them while retaining the timeless gameplay that made them all-time classic games in the first place. It allowed gamers to enjoy them in a way the original creators could never have envisaged, a captivating blend of retro and modern, much like this publication. However, while *Tetris 99* has remained live since its launch in 2019, *Super Mario Bros. 35* leapt off the Switch as quickly as it leapt onto it. It was a



strictly limited-time proposition designed to celebrate the 35th anniversary of *Super Mario Bros.* on the NES, launching on October 1st 2020, and shutting down on March 31st 2021. A week after closing the plumbing business, Nintendo dropped a surprise new multiplayer on Switch Online: *Pac-Man 99*, the game we have gathered here to mourn today.

Ah, *Pac-Man 99*, we hardly knew you, and, well,



Above: Mario apparently racing against 34 clones of himself in *Super Mario Bros. 35*.



PAC-MAN VS.

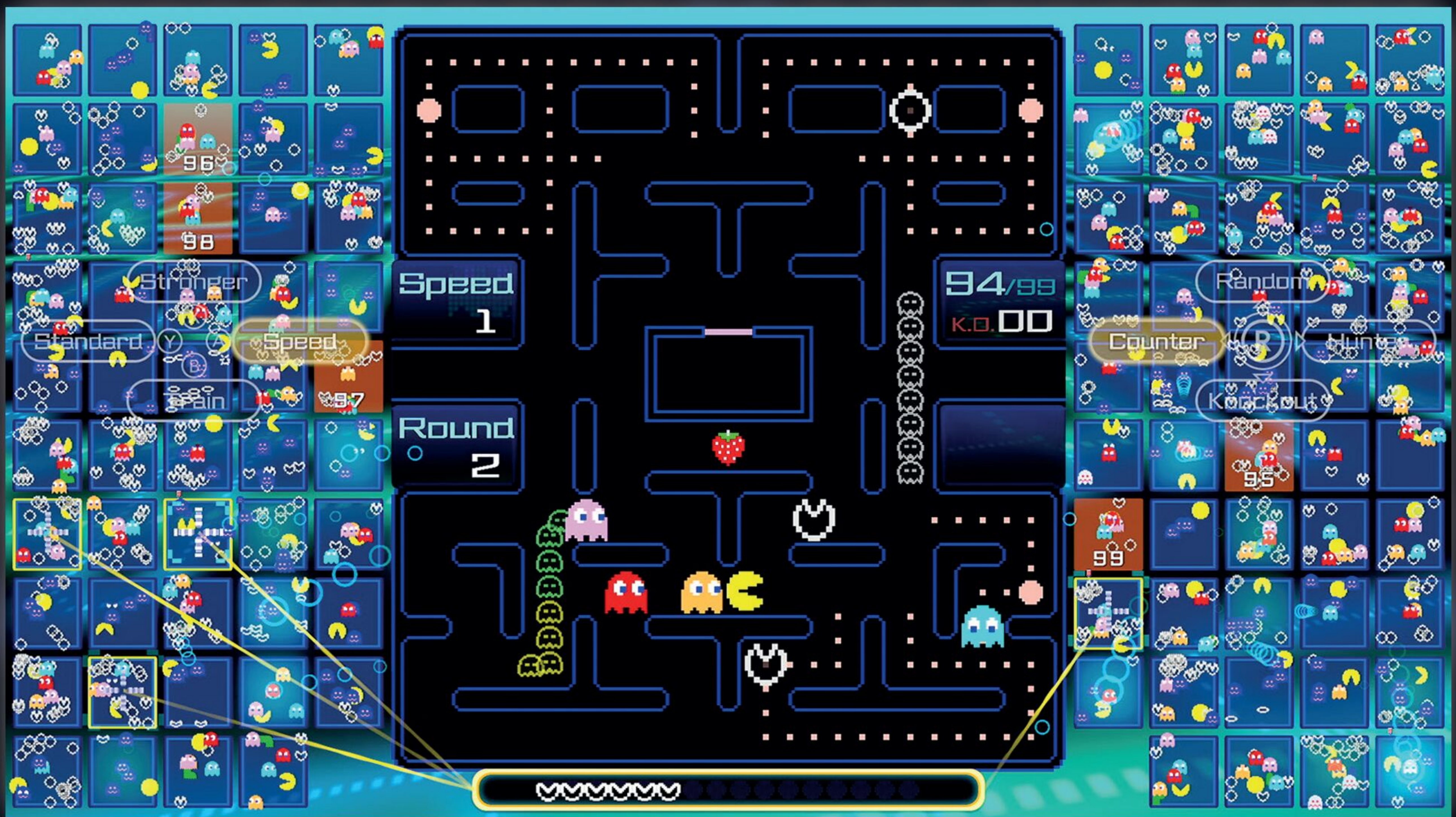
Pac-Man 99 wasn't the first attempt to turn *Pac-Man*'s maze munching into a multiplayer experience on Nintendo hardware. In 2003,

when online multiplayer games were less commonplace, the somewhat cumbersome *Pac-Man Vs* arrived for the GameCube. It required a GameBoy Advance and a Link Cable to function, with one player controlling Pac-Man via the GBA and another taking on the role of the ghosts via the GameCube and TV.



On September 14th 2023, it became clear why *Pac-Man 99* had to give up the ghost as a new contender entered the "99 games" arena. Fielding its first new entry in the Video game race for 20 years was the well-loved but somewhat under-served futuristic racing series, *F-Zero*. It seems *Pac-Man 99* had to die so that a 99-player version of the original SNES *F-Zero* could live.





Above: *Pac-Man 99* let you choose which enemy types to target to knock out.



Above: Cosmetic themes for *Pac-Man 99* based on other classic Namco titles can be purchased as DLC.

that's not entirely true because you were still the classic *Pac-Man* arcade game we know and love at your core. So we'd already gotten to know you pretty well over the years. Indeed, the basic gameplay of *Pac-Man 99* remained much the same as ever, except this time, you were playing simultaneously with 98 other players. The

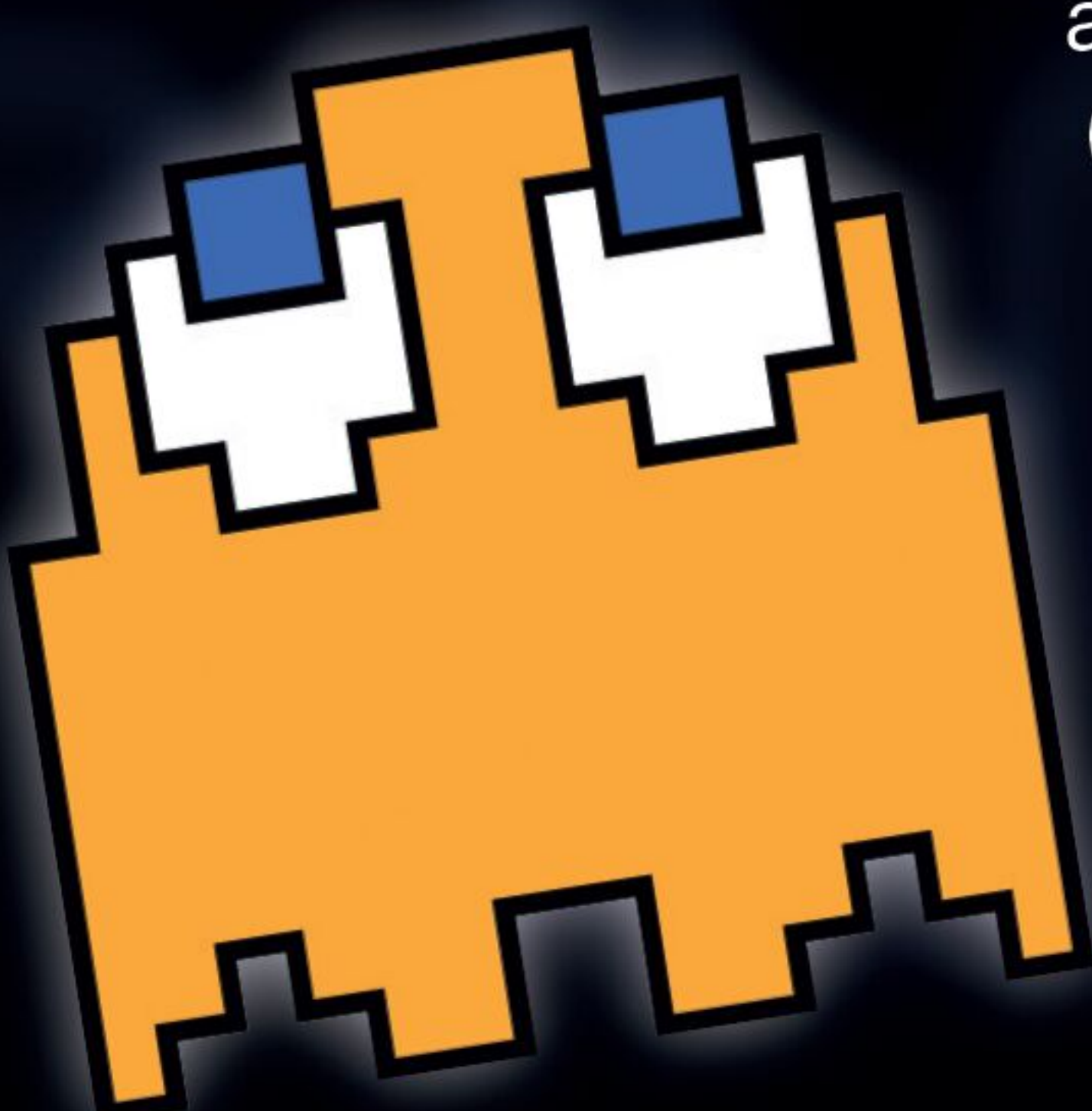
aim was to be the last (Pac) man standing, and chomping ghosts would send ghostly Pac-Men to clog up your opponents' mazes in an attempt to slow them down. With a bit of luck, this would knock

them out of the game until, eventually, the 99 Pac-Men are whittled down to just one.

Sadly, I never did manage to be the last Pac standing, and I've never won on *Tetris 99* either, though I did win *Super Mario Bros. 35* once. However, I did reach the final ten in *Pac-Man 99* several times, which was always a thrill as the tempo of the music increased, adding to the sense of panic when trying to survive against those dastardly ghosts. *Pac-Man 99* was a superlative online arcade multiplayer experience, and I will miss it greatly. In fact, with 125 hours put into it, *Pac-Man 99* is my third most-played Switch game of all time. Not bad for a freebie!

Pac-Man 99 is survived by 2022's *Pac-Man World Re-Pac* and *Pac-Man 99's* Private Match and offline modes (available as paid-for DLC), but alas, they can't match the enjoyment of taking on 98 random strangers in a *Pac-Man* battle royale. Speaking of which, throughout *Pac-Man 99's* relatively short life, I never had trouble getting a game, suggesting that it remained popular until its sad demise.

It fills my heart with power pills and fruit that the circular yellow fella continues to have such relevance in the video game world some 43 years after his first appearance. He's almost as old as I am! We're kindred spirits, Pac-Man and I, and I hope we remain so until the number 99 refers to one of our ages. ■





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FUSION



FUSION MUSICAL MARVELS

GEORGE STURGEON RAISES A GLASS TO A MISSION WELL DONE AS HE CELEBRATES WITH FRIENDS IN THE MOONSHINE BAR OF *RED DEAD ONLINE*. DOWNING A DRINK AS THE BAND BEGINS TO PLAY, THE SOUNDS OF A NEW MUSICAL MARVEL SOON FILL THE AIR.



Musical Marvel: The Moonshine Band

Game: Red Dead Online

System: PC, PS4/5, Xbox One/Series

Composer: Woody Jackson

Year: 2019

Soundtrack Link:

<https://bit.ly/45XUyDo>

SCAN ME!



■ The Moonshine Band earn their place as a Musical Marvel for delivering a soundtrack that perfectly captures the Old West's ambience and will have you foot tapping and line dancing before you know it. The band's grasp of country, blues, folk, and old-timey tunes are absolutely authentic to the Wild West setting and bring a sense of cosiness to the buzzing social atmosphere of the bar. Especially compared to the untamed wilderness waiting for you and your gang beyond the doors of the Moonshine Shack.



SOUND DESIGN

This striking example of folk music begins with an amazingly catchy tune from the violin, immediately evoking the game's Cowboy theme. As the tune progresses, its momentum builds as the pianist and banjo player join in, turning this folk song into something rather jolly and upbeat. From a sound design perspective, this track is unique because the music is actively being performed live by the band at the Moonshine Bar. Their animations are not just repetitive random movements, as their body gestures and playing styles match each track to a believable degree that's sure to impress. Although the band seemingly plays tracks at random, this particular piece stood out for its high-energy tempo and prominent violin melody.

With the band in front of you and their music in full swing, the numerous interactive elements that players find around the bar can impact both its atmosphere and the quality of the music itself. Guzzle down one too many glasses of moonshine, and you'll either find yourself dancing like a drunkard or kicking off a classic bar fight. Taking over from the band is also an option, but your musical contribution leaves much to be desired when you're in a drunken stupor. Aside from probably ruining the band's reputation, it's a really clever interactive idea.

Whilst our plan to join the band started with the best intentions, unfortunately, it ended with a poor attempt at spinning around on the chair while playing the piano, and almost dropping to the floor. Perhaps these things are best left to the professionals.

CONCLUSION

The Moonshine Band brings that all-important Old Western spirit to the Moonshine Shack in *Red Dead Online*. Seeing the band play is a marvellous distraction that will keep you here for just one more... hic! ■

toy-polloi

STAR WARS

EPISODE I MINI FIGURES

■ Back in 1999, every Star Wars fan was excited because, for the first time since 1983, we were getting an all-new film, Star Wars Episode One: The Phantom Menace! The trailers made it look really exciting, and everyone was hopeful that this movie would be as good as the original trilogy.

At the time of the film's release, we were visiting my brother in the US, who had managed to get us tickets to see a midnight showing on its opening night. I was really looking forward to it; having already picked up a few of the new toys, I couldn't wait to finally see how they fit into the story. We got to the cinema early as we knew a long queue would be waiting to go in. Everyone there was getting increasingly excited; some dressed up as Star Wars characters, others were battling with lightsabers, and the time flew by. We were soon sat waiting for the film to start in a theatre full of over-excited





Americans whooping and cheering as the titles came on screen.

Two hours later, we left the cinema more than a little deflated. It was ok, but not great. What had gone so wrong? Everyone was hoping for the excitement and action we all remembered from the original trilogy; what we got was some of that interspersed with politics and an annoying CG sidekick. Maybe I was just tired, as it was now about three in the morning. Tomorrow, perhaps I'll remember it differently...

More than twenty years later, I still believe it's not a great film. I can watch it, which is more than can be said for the other two prequels, but I don't watch it often. It just doesn't have the charm or excitement the originals have, for me.

That said, it hasn't stopped me from collecting the toys that were released at the time. Star Wars Episode One: The Phantom Menace is the last Star Wars film I bothered to try and collect every 3 3/4 inch figure that came out for it. The toys had the same qualities I liked from the original vintage figures, simple articulation and design, and they were made to be played with and not as display pieces for collectors. After Episode One, the toys went down a different path, and I just wasn't interested in them.

Most Episode One toys are easy to collect and readily available at toy fairs and online. Boxed, and even mint, they still are so common that they go for next to nothing. The large Naboo Royal Starship Blockade cruiser playset and a couple of the figures like R2-B1 and the protocol droid TC-14 are harder to find, but on the whole, it's a cheap and easy line of toys to collect.



mini figures

It was on a trip to Japan that I first came across Hasbro's mini figures. I'd not heard of or seen anything about them before and could have easily passed them by. At first glance, they look like regular action figures, and even the packaging looks the same. On closer inspection, you realise these figures are much smaller, at only two inches tall, and much simpler, with only four points of articulation.

Eight mini figures were made in total: Obi-wan Kenobi, Qui-Gon Jinn, Padme Naberrie, Queen Amidala, Anakin Skywalker, Jar Jar Binks, Darth Maul, and a Battle Droid. Only three of these figures come with accessories: Lightsabers for Obi-Wan, Qui-Gon, and Darth Maul. Each figure has a great sculpt, is well painted, and full of detail. However, the scale of the mini figures means articulation is limited to a rotating head, simple arm and leg movement, and a bend at the



"THE INTERGALACTIC ACTION CONTINUES WITH THIS EXCLUSIVE GIFT SET COMPLETE WITH EIGHT MINIATURE, FULLY POSEABLE FIGURES AND AUTHENTICALLY STYLED NABOO FIGHTER FROM STAR WARS: EPISODE 1, SO YOU CAN RECREATE ALL THE EXCITEMENT OF THE MOVIE"



waist. Figures were available individually carded or as part of a gift pack of all eight with a Naboo Starfighter for Anakin to fly.

At the time of my visit, I was focused on collecting a different range of toys, so I didn't buy any Hasbro mini figures. How I regret that now! These little figures have stuck in my mind, and on every trip back to Japan, I have kept my eyes peeled for them. Of course now, because I want them, I rarely see them. I have only found three carded figures and one well-played with loose Padme.

My most recent trip to Tokyo finally proved fruitful, and on my last day of toy hunting, I found what I had been looking for all these years, the Mini figure gift set, including the Naboo fighter. Even though these are now nearly 25 years old, the price for this set was very reasonable. The set originally sold at \$49.99 and was limited to

25,000 copies, so £40 seemed a great price to me. I couldn't let it slip through my fingers again. It was finally mine!

I am thrilled to have the Naboo fighter set in my collection. I'd still like to find the remaining single-carded figures I don't have, but these can go on my long-time 'grail' toy list. There is something likeable about these smaller figures, and I wish they had made a few more. As far as I can determine, these were released across the Far East and possibly in Australia. Very few people collect them or know much about them, so if you can help, please get in touch. ■



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REVIEWS

THE FUSION TEAM GIVE THE VERDICT ON THEIR NON-COIN-MUNCHING CABINETS

Street Fighter II Champion Edition

Release Year: 2018

Paid in 2019: £289 inc delivery

Current price: £243

Games: *Street Fighter II Champion Edition*, *Super Street Fighter II*, *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*

Words: Ben Honebone

This was my first Arcade 1UP cabinet, and it did everything it says on the tin. The build is a simple flat-pack assembly with easy-to-follow instructions, and the quality of the parts is as good as it needs to be – nothing more. The artwork of the original arcade machine is reproduced well, and the addition of perspex screen and control deck protectors is welcome. It should stand the test of time if you look after it and don't place it in direct sunlight.

Unfortunately, the same can't be said about the controls. The joystick and buttons feel cheap. They work just fine, but in my opinion, the "feel" of an arcade machine is not replicated. They really should have used something of a higher quality for a game like *Street Fighter II*, which relies heavily on precision inputs. I'd like to tell you how long the stock controls will last with regular use, but I replaced mine within a month or two, and everything "feels" better now.

The LCD screen is also low-quality, with the panel prone to pixel burn-in, but it gets the job done. The audio is also distinctly "budget", with a single speaker mounted underneath the right-hand side of the control deck. There is audible distortion at max volume, but the likelihood of anyone needing to have the cabinet at such a volume seems slim (at least to me).

As for the games, it's a fine selection with vanilla *Champion Edition* supported by the original *Super Street Fighter II* and the essential, final "Super Turbo" version of *SFII* that is still played in tournaments today. They are emulated well, and I have no complaints about input delay or screen-tearing.

Simple but effective, it's a great entry point for those wanting to spend as little as possible, and it's easy to mod if you're so inclined.





Atari Legacy Centipede Edition

Release Year: 2022

Paid in 2022: £320 inc. delivery

Current price: £300

Games: Akka Arrh, Asteroids, Asteroids Deluxe, Centipede, Crystal Castles, Gravitar, Liberator, Loner Lander, Major Havoc, Millipede, Missile Command, Space Duel, Super Breakout, Tempest

Words: Paul Morrison

The Atari Legacy *Centipede* Edition is a little different to cabinets you've seen that specialise in one series. For starters, there's no joystick. That instantly rules out most of the games you'd want on an arcade machine. However, Arcade 1UP have included both a trackball and a spinner, which opens up some real classics that you don't often get to play "properly".

There are 14 games included on this cabinet, and the mix is varied and unusual. Aside from the game the cabinet is modelled on, and the obvious accompanying sequel, *Millipede*, you have *Missile Command* and *Crystal Castles* to supplement the inclusion of the trackball. It's hard to argue the classic status of all four of those games, and it's great to see them all here. I've never been much of a fan of *Crystal Castles*, but it's good to be able to play it at home, with a trackball, as intended. As for *Missile Command*, I've always been rubbish at it, but at least now I can adjust the settings and decide whether I want to play as Tony Temple or Mr. Awesome.

To further justify its use, you have two more uncommon games: *Major Havoc*, and *Liberator*. They're probably the weakest games on the cabinet, though. *Liberator* sees you defending the planet from missile attacks, but from the viewpoint of outer space, rather than at *Missile Command*'s ground level. It's OK, but nothing to write home about. I've always found *Major Havoc* to be a weird game. It feels like a prototype that was greenlit for production by accident. It uses vector graphics when there's no need, it uses a trackball controller when there's no need, and it's simply not much fun to play. It's by far the least loaded game on my cabinet.

If there's one arcade game you think of when talking about a spinner controller, it's *Tempest*, and yes, it's here, and it's glorious. The only other game to take advantage of this controller, though, is *Super Breakout*. It's a fine historical document, for sure, but it's scarcely the stuff gaming dreams are made of, even when you are able to play it properly.

Speaking of vector graphics, we have the daddy of the genre – *Asteroids*. It's a game I always found difficult in the arcades, but I've really enjoyed sitting down at a cabinet in the comfort of my own home and learning how to play it better, if not well. I've really come to appreciate it a lot more, and the same can be said of its sequel, *Asteroids Deluxe*. Rounding out the vector-style games, we have *Gravitar*, which

was the inspiration for the computer game, *Thrust*, the crusty classic that is *Lunar Lander*, which is always good for a few short blasts, and the one-player version of *Space Duel*.

The final game included on this cabinet is the previously unreleased *Akka Arrh*. It's a curious title, and when you can play it, you can kind of understand why it never made it into the arcades. It's more suited to long sessions, rather than coin munching. You may have heard the name recently, as Llamasoft have made a reimagined version for modern consoles. As a home game, it's really quite good once you get the hang of it.

One game I'd have loved to see on here

Pac-Man Partycade

Release Year: 2020

Paid in 2022: £205 inc delivery

Current price: £349

Games: *Pac-Man*, *Dig-Dug*, *Galaga*, *Galaxian*

Words: Paul Twist

Many valid arguments can be raised against Arcade 1UP's replica arcade cabinets: the games are emulated and available much cheaper elsewhere, and they offer poor value in terms of game per pound. But I don't care! They're a lot of fun, and that's all that matters to me. I'll never own a proper arcade machine, and playing on this machine gives me the same thrill I got when playing arcade games as a child, making it more than worthwhile for me.

The *Pac-Man* Partycade is sturdy and well-made, and it looks great, with a vibrant screen that feels like an arcade screen. The joystick and buttons also have an authentic arcade feel, creating a genuinely nostalgic experience. As I alluded to earlier, it's a lot of money to pay for four ancient games in 2023, even for these four bonafide Namco classics from the golden age of the arcade on offer here. The games are the iconic maze muncher *Pac-Man*, the subterranean baddie pumper *Dig Dug*, and the *Space Invaders*-influenced classics *Galaxian* and *Galaga*. There isn't a dud amongst them, but considering it's nominally a *Pac-Man* machine, it's a shame that there aren't more games from Pac's own back catalogue. It would be easier to recommend purchasing if *Ms. Pac-Man*, *Pacland* and *Pacmania* had all been included.

is *Quantum*. It would have taken advantage of the trackball perfectly, and it's not a game you see often. It also would have meant you got five games per menu page, which would surely be better for anyone's OCD tendencies! Still, this is a good package with a decent selection of games, and certainly something any arcade aficionado with an itchy trigger finger should consider, if they're interested in owning a replica arcade cabinet and aren't too bothered about absolute authenticity.



In all honesty, I don't play on it very often, but I have no regrets about buying the Arcade 1UP *Pac-Man* Partycade. It's not one for hardcore collectors, yet it never fails to attract admiring glances and comments from visitors to my home. I recommend this particular Arcade 1UP if you have fond memories of pumping 10ps into the coin-ops included. It's also a relatively cost-effective and space-effective way to relive those salad days of gaming at home.





Killer Instinct

Release Year: 2022

Paid in 2022: £1021 inc delivery

Current price: \$800 (US & CA)

Games: *Killer Instinct*, *Killer Instinct II*, *Battletoads*, *Battletoads (NES)*, *Battletoads (SNES)*

Words: Ben Honebone

Stop rubbing your eyes. You read that price correctly. The *Killer Instinct* cabinet has not been released in the UK or Europe, so I had to import one from America. The shipping fee was close to a third of the price of the cabinet! I had to sell a lot of stuff on eBay and give in to sheer stupidity, but it's mine now. It's undoubtedly one of the most extravagant and impractical things

I've ever bought, but you only live once, right? With that confession out of the way, let's look at the cabinet.

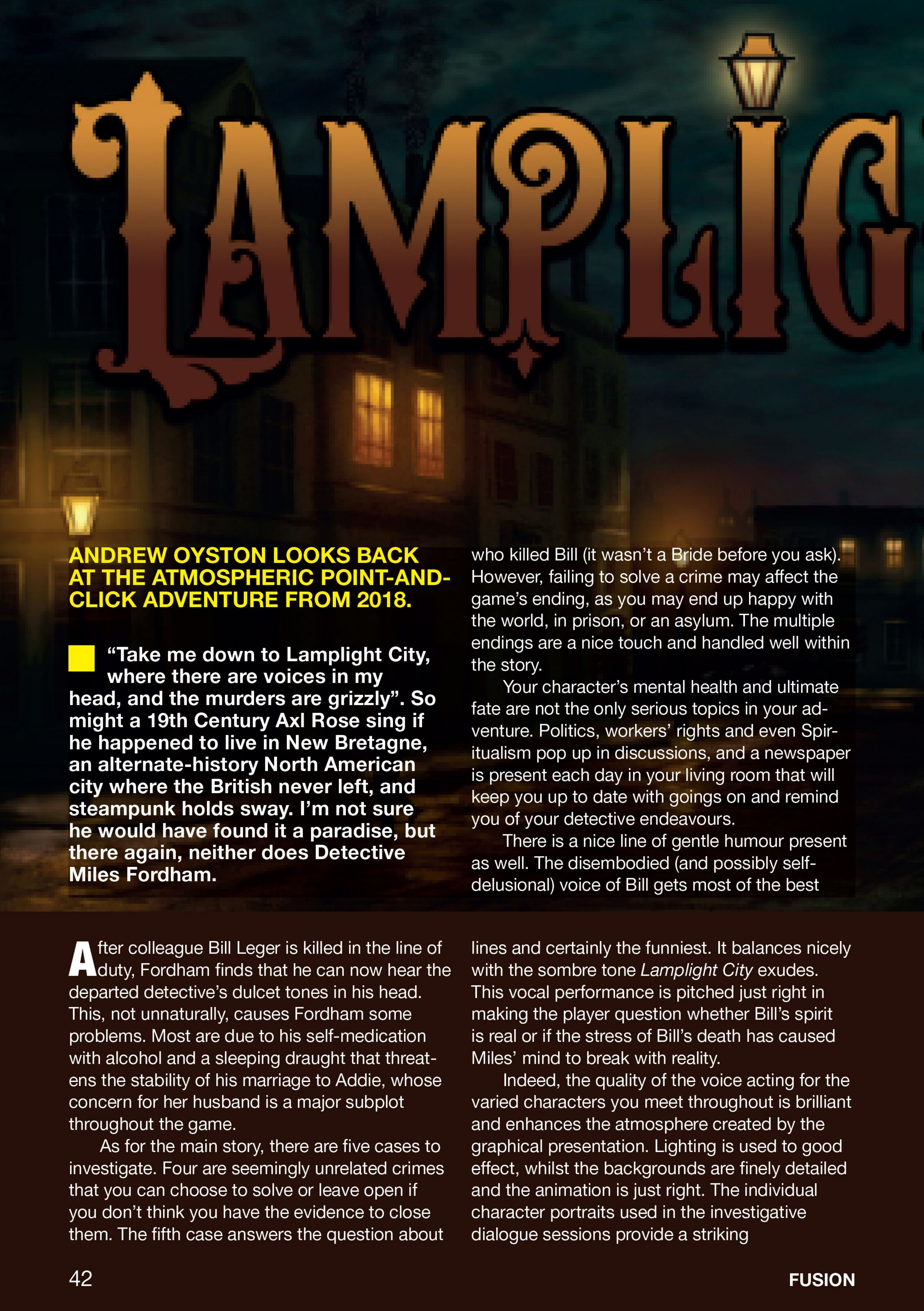
Killer Instinct is one of the new generation of Arcade 1UP machines, with several improvements. It's taller, and the design resembles a more traditional arcade cabinet, complete with an imitation coin door. The control deck is kitted out with lights that have several colours to choose from, and the title marquee lights up (just like the real thing!). However, the most important new feature is the online functionality. *Killer Instinct* has WiFi and a simple but effective online matchmaking system with rollback netcode. There is also a spectator mode, which is an excellent feature all by itself, but it also helps add some of that "arcade flavour", with other players able to watch you fight, assess your skill level and challenge you if they wish.

Both versions of the original *Killer Instinct* arcade game are included (the game received one revision) with an option to switch between them. The emulation has been handled exceptionally well by Code Mystics, and having *KI* running smoothly on something other than an Xbox or a PC is a joy. The included scanline filter is also excellent. Along with *KI2*, *Battletoads* is also present, which makes sense as it's a beat 'em-up and Rare's only other arcade game apart from *X The Ball* (a Football game). Bizarrely, the 8-bit and 16-bit home versions of *Battletoads* are also included, which is a nice bonus but ultimately makes you wish they had added *Battletoads Vs Double Dragon* as well.

The controls feel better than the *SFII* cabinet, but alas, I'd still describe them as "Fisher Price", particularly the buttons. I haven't upgraded them yet, but you can bet I will, eventually. The screen performs well, and I assume this is also an upgrade from the original model because with no pixel burn and a crisp image – you get no complaints.

Overall, the *Killer Instinct* cabinet features a host of welcome and well-implemented improvements. It's also a fantastic-looking machine that's quite faithful to the original, and Code Mystics has done an excellent job with the software. The only drawbacks are the cheap controls and the terrifying price. ■





ANDREW OYSTON LOOKS BACK AT THE ATMOSPHERIC POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURE FROM 2018.

■ “Take me down to Lamplight City, where there are voices in my head, and the murders are grizzly”. So might a 19th Century Axl Rose sing if he happened to live in New Bretagne, an alternate-history North American city where the British never left, and steampunk holds sway. I’m not sure he would have found it a paradise, but there again, neither does Detective Miles Fordham.

After colleague Bill Leger is killed in the line of duty, Fordham finds that he can now hear the departed detective’s dulcet tones in his head. This, not unnaturally, causes Fordham some problems. Most are due to his self-medication with alcohol and a sleeping draught that threatens the stability of his marriage to Addie, whose concern for her husband is a major subplot throughout the game.

As for the main story, there are five cases to investigate. Four are seemingly unrelated crimes that you can choose to solve or leave open if you don’t think you have the evidence to close them. The fifth case answers the question about

who killed Bill (it wasn’t a Bride before you ask). However, failing to solve a crime may affect the game’s ending, as you may end up happy with the world, in prison, or an asylum. The multiple endings are a nice touch and handled well within the story.

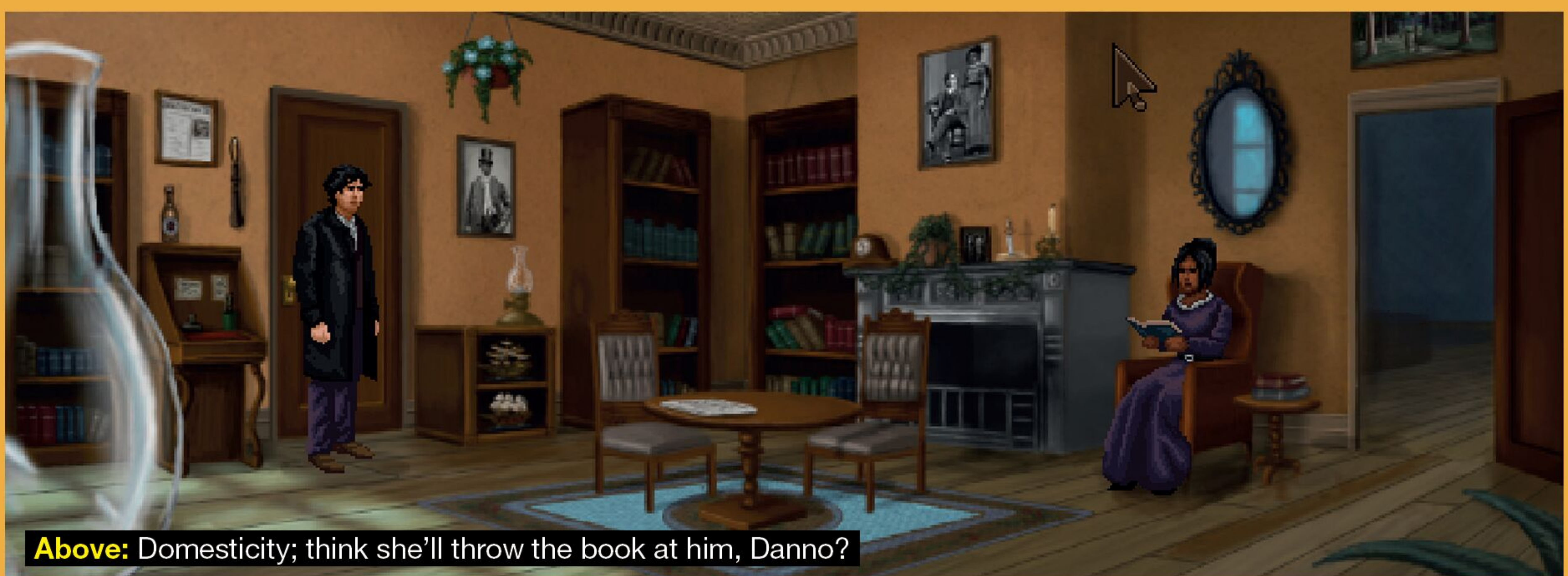
Your character’s mental health and ultimate fate are not the only serious topics in your adventure. Politics, workers’ rights and even Spiritualism pop up in discussions, and a newspaper is present each day in your living room that will keep you up to date with goings on and remind you of your detective endeavours.

There is a nice line of gentle humour present as well. The disembodied (and possibly self-delusional) voice of Bill gets most of the best

lines and certainly the funniest. It balances nicely with the sombre tone *Lamplight City* exudes. This vocal performance is pitched just right in making the player question whether Bill’s spirit is real or if the stress of Bill’s death has caused Miles’ mind to break with reality.

Indeed, the quality of the voice acting for the varied characters you meet throughout is brilliant and enhances the atmosphere created by the graphical presentation. Lighting is used to good effect, whilst the backgrounds are finely detailed and the animation is just right. The individual character portraits used in the investigative dialogue sessions provide a striking

HIT CITY





counterpoint to the more traditional point-and-click aesthetic used elsewhere. The title music is a worthy introduction to the dark and mysterious *Lamplight City* world. However, it's the in-game music that truly impresses - it matches the locations you visit to a tee. Several tunes threaten to become earworm material if you are not careful, which brings me to the game's most impressive achievement.

New Bretagne's look, feel, and sounds evoke a sublime sense of time and place. After spending around ten hours on my first playthrough, it's easy to understand why New Bretagne was chosen as one of the locales featured in the scholarly tome *Virtual Cities* by Konstantinos Dimopoulos. The impression of a living, breathing city is enhanced by the portrayal of a society that, although more technologically advanced than our mid-18th century was, retains the many

social tensions that were all too present in reality.

Lamplight City's central story is an engaging tale and one that is very evenly paced. It's not overly difficult, with the multiple endings practically demanding return visits. It doesn't outstay its welcome and provides (mostly) gentle brain-teasing puzzles and a host of characters that you'll know and empathise with deeply by the end of your time in *Lamplight City*. The setting, too, is something special, and the nation of Vespuccia will once again be the destination for developer Francisco Gonzalez on Grundislav Games' next title. The currently in-development *Rosewater* switches the Industrial Revolution urban chaos of New Bretagne for the wild west. It promises to enhance further the developer's reputation for creating wonderful point-and-click adventures. ■



For all your Retro news!



FUSIONRGAMER.COM





in good Faith

When a new AAA game lands on our gaming launch pads, you can't start a rocket booster before running into some controversy. *Starfield* has taken off on Xbox and has faced some criticism already, and it's different from the usual issues with bugs, paid-for DLC or download problems. This time, *Starfield* has found itself in the centre of some galactic political

storm that has nothing to do with how good the game is or whether anybody is enjoying it. You would think a game set in the future that deals with humanity's problems with resources and space wars would be forgiven for having some new ideas about society or how we might find ourselves in the 24th century.

The initial controversy came in the form of review scores. Oh, the bane of any game reviewer's existence is what score to give a game that is both honest and fair. *Starfield* has achieved a Metacritic score of 86% for the Xbox console and 87% for the PC version. Every gamer and their goldfish had something to say when the scores were released. For most players, the score reflected a decent game that is worth playing, maybe not a timeless classic, but certainly one worthy of a purchase or Game Pass download. However, some were very quick to point out that *Starfield* has scored lower than several PlayStation exclusives, and because of this, PlayStation MUST be the best console.

Droves of PlayStation fans lined up to point out that there was an extra percentage point for games such as the latest *Horizon* on Metacritic. Who cares? Both are great games, and had the scale tipped the other way, would the PlayStation fans be congratulating Xbox for the win?

Enjoy your games, stop focusing on the console, and just play what you want. It's difficult to justify owning all the latest consoles as the hardware is expensive and games even more so in the bigger scheme of things. So play what you want and understand that we can't have everything. It may be a shame that *Starfield* is an Xbox exclusive, but there are plenty of great games on your PlayStation or





Switch to enjoy. *Zelda* and *Final Fantasy*, anyone?

Once the dust had settled on the issue of review scores, it didn't take long for the next ridiculous controversy to rear its ugly head - pronouns. The critique spawned when players started commenting on the character design aspect of *Starfield*. Like every good RPG game that ever existed, *Starfield* tasks you with creating your character.

You can choose all the usual things: hair, skin colour, body type, face type, and all the endless customisation many modern games provide. However, right towards the end of the character creation process, you can select your pronouns from he/him, she/her, and they/them. It's really that simple, but some weird folks insist that this makes *Starfield*, and by extension, developer Bethesda, "woke" and pandering to the LGBT+ community.

As a member of that community, I don't go out of my way to throw it in people's faces or demand that game companies cater to my needs. I wouldn't make a fuss if *Starfield* didn't include the pronoun option. Will anyone miss the players who chose to refund the game and "boycott" Microsoft and Bethesda because they wanted to be inclusive?

As I pondered how to put this opinion piece together, I realised we have a long way to go as a gaming community. I would never want to change how someone thinks or sees the world, but if you can't show kindness and acceptance to those different to you - keep quiet and save your opinion for a political forum. *Starfield* is a video game; it's not politics. Bethesda is not trying to control your thoughts; they aren't pandering to a small section of the gaming community. They are just making the game inclusive for anyone who might play it. Please just enjoy games and save the politics for another time and place. ■



Left: When you find hidden items, you can view them inside your ship. **Below:** One of many glitches, “Stop floating, Dal. You’re not impressing anyone!”.



ZOË KIRK-ROBINSON BOLDLY GOES WHERE NO OTHER MEMBER OF THE FUSION TEAM HAS GONE BEFORE.

■ Star Trek has always been an ensemble show, and even the Star Trek games tend to follow that idea, with all the characters working together to achieve a goal. So it should come as no surprise that *Star Trek Prodigy: Supernova* is designed as a co-op game first and foremost, with the single-player option feeling like an afterthought for much of the game. Even when you play solo, the game reminds you that it’s all about that co-op at the end of each level, when it grades the characters based on how much they did.

Prodigy is a game about central characters Dal R’El and Gwyndala. Other members of the Prodigy crew are absent for most of the game because the plot centres around rescuing them. Dal and Gwyndala need to find their crew because when everyone is back together, they can all go and fight the big baddie of the story. There’s a subplot about Dal and Gwyndala’s growing relationship and Gwyndala’s relationship with her father and her people. Sadly, neither can be resolved because those are plots from the TV show. As a result, the story doesn’t feel like it goes anywhere and is mainly here as an excuse to string the levels together.

Presentation-wise, the graphics are basic, and nobody changes their facial expressions during dramatic dialogue. At one point, the game glitched so much that the final boss battle had to be undertaken with only one character because the other got stuck in the beam-in sequence. While defeating Gwyndala’s nemesis with her alone seemed pretty interesting from a narrative standpoint, seeing Dal still floating in the air during the resulting cutscene was annoying.

Sticking to the subject of annoying things, Dal is an utterly unlikeable character throughout the game. His personality

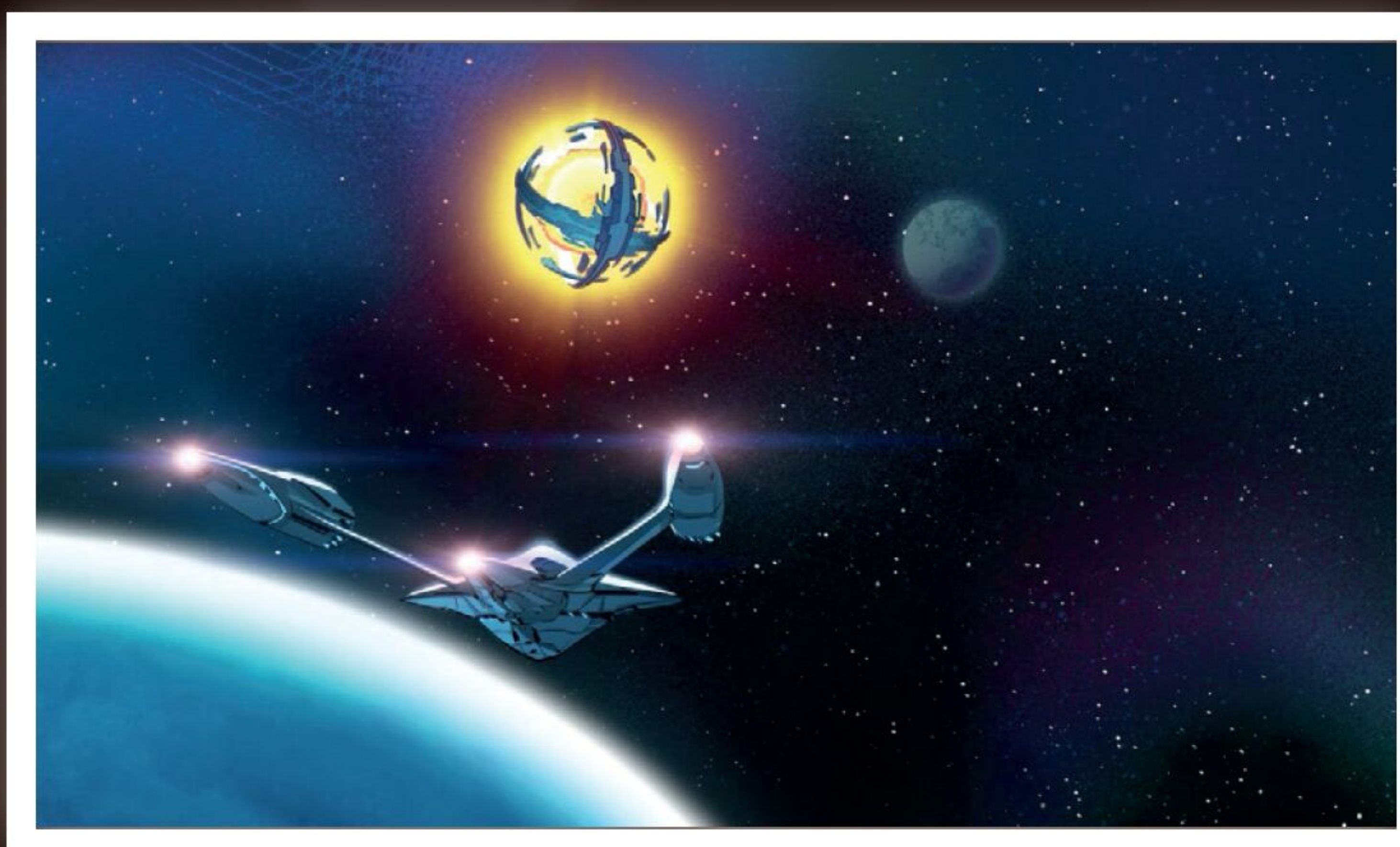




is obnoxious in the show, but he becomes marginally more tolerable by the end of season one. However, the writers for this game didn't get that memo because he's a self-aggrandising idiot throughout.

The game's main focus is moving blocks around to unlock new routes and reach objectives, which is where the game shines. However, you can be forgiven for not finding it appealing immediately because the puzzles aren't interesting until world three, when all the different mechanics have been introduced. Puzzles include sliding boxes to either deflect or absorb lasers, carrying blocks to divert power flows, and some excellent time travel mechanics where the two player characters have to work together in different time zones to achieve a goal in the present. None of the puzzles are particularly taxing, but the later levels can be long and surprisingly enjoyable.

Combat breaks up the puzzle-solving and gives the two playable characters a chance to showcase their individual traits. Gwyndala is a melee specialist who prefers swords, while Dal is primarily a ranged fighter carrying two phasers. It may sound like it brings a lot of variety to the fighting, but in practice, it does not. You'll quickly find one character whose style you prefer (or whose voice actor is less grating when they say one of their three sound-bites over and over again) and stick with them. Fans of more action-adventure gaming will want to avoid *Prodigy* or at least readjust their expectations. It's a puzzle game set in the Star Trek universe, and it's completely unapologetic



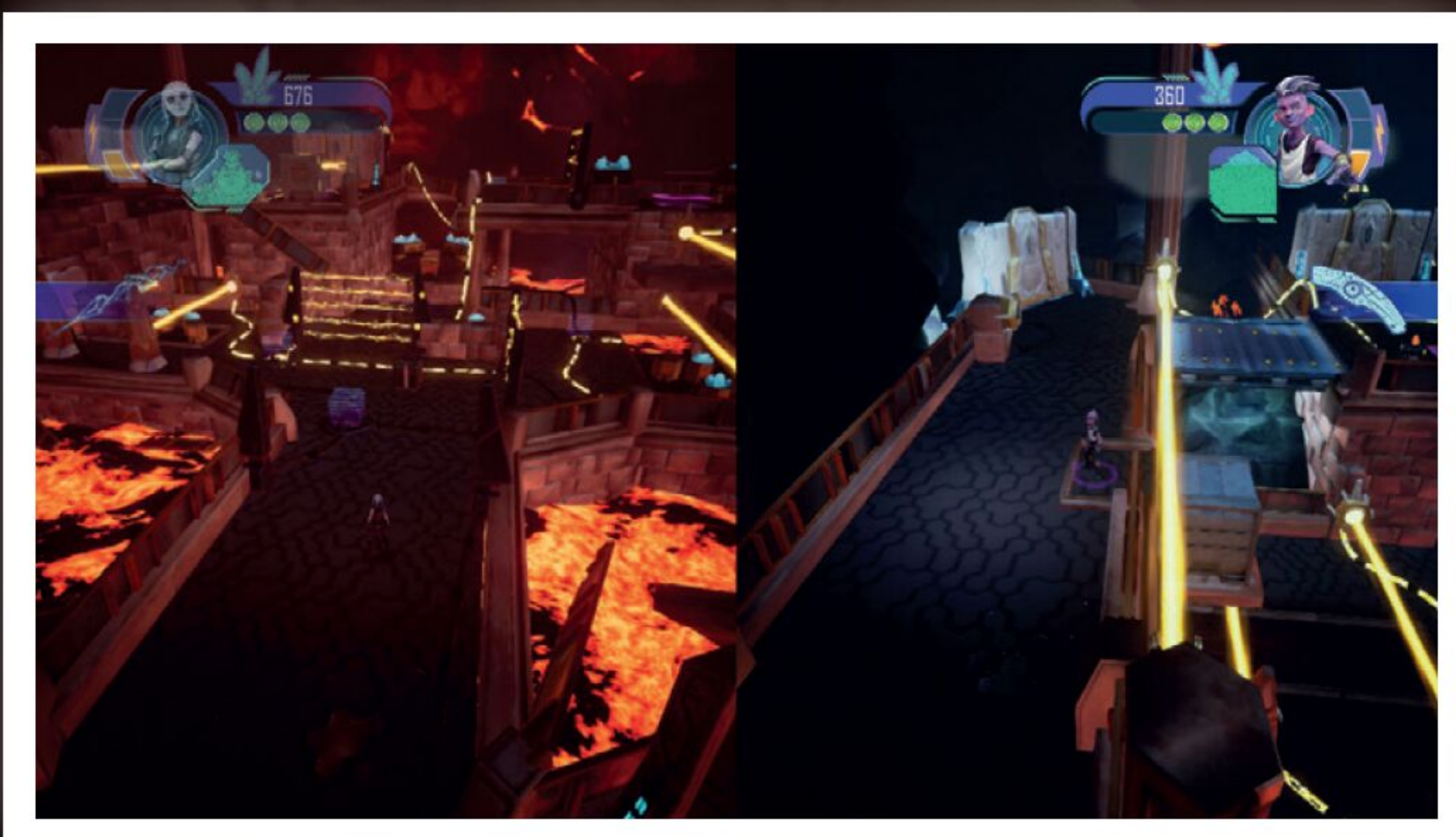
Above: The story begins and ends with motion comic-style cutscenes.

about that. The combat is little more than an exercise in button-mashing, and even the unlockable upgrades don't make it enjoyable.

Sadly (or maybe happily?), World Three is the last stop because this game is incredibly short. You'll be hard-pressed to get eight or nine hours out of the whole experience. The various unlockables and hidden items in the levels may provide a sense of replayability for some players. For others, going through a long level a second time just to check a box won't be appealing. This is doubly true when you factor in that all the hidden items unlock upgrades that won't help you because you can finish the game well enough without them.

So, with the plot not going anywhere, the game not being very long, and the replayability being mostly absent, what else is there? Honestly, not a lot. It's a game aimed at fans of the show - a show that was not only cancelled soon after the game was released but actively deleted from the streaming platform that owns it. The game is a monument to a show whose owners aren't interested in it, which seems like an apt metaphor for the whole thing.

If you enjoy relatively simplistic puzzle games or like the sound of the dual-time-period puzzle mechanics on later levels, give *Prodigy* a try. It's an inexpensive game, and it won't take more than a few evenings to get through it. ■



Above: When the screen is split, everything becomes too small.



HEWSON

AT

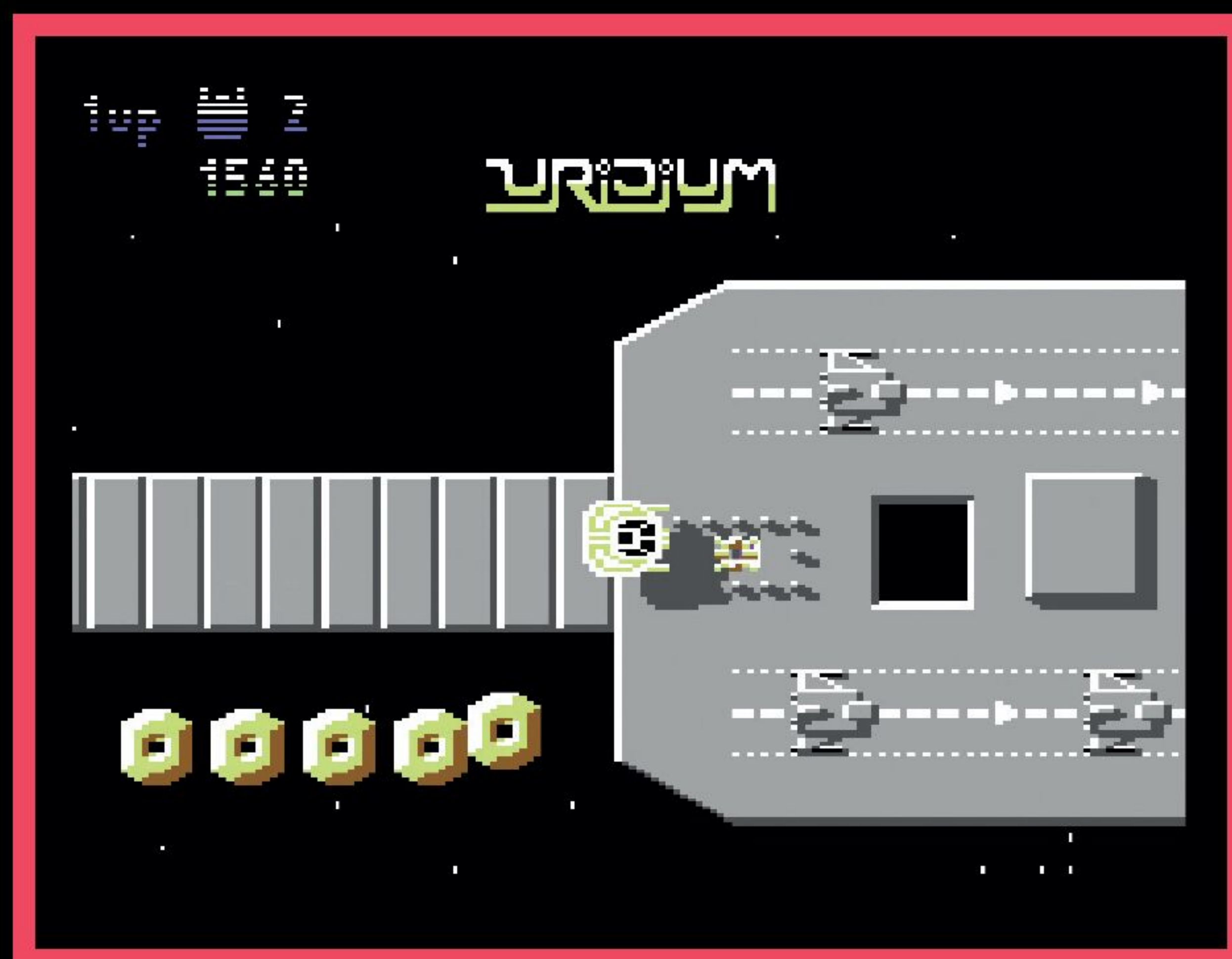
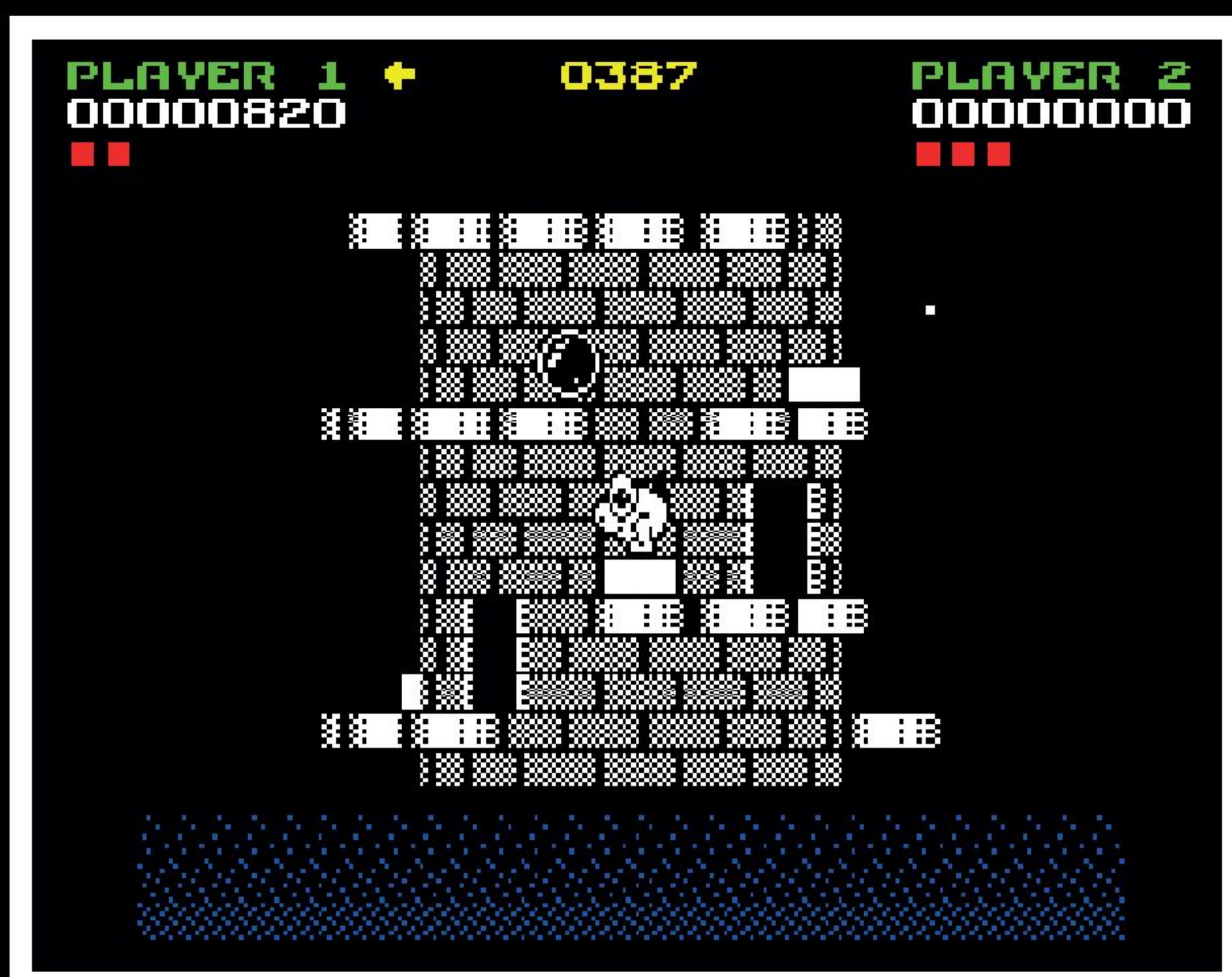
Antstream[®] ARCADE

PAUL HENDERSON GETS STUCK INTO SOME HEWSON CLASSICS ON ANTSTREAM.

■ One of the great things about Antstream Arcade is that the games are licensed, which means many iconic software houses from back in the day have a large chunk of their catalogues on the service. So, in this month's feature, we're looking at Hewson Consultants, who released many great games on 8-bit and 16-bit systems, including some absolute classics, many of which you can find on Antstream.

Nebulus (C64/Spectrum/Amiga)

Undoubtedly one of Hewson's classics, *Nebulus* is a game that holds a special place in the hearts of gamers regardless of which system they had it on. In this innovative platform game, you play a frog-like creature called Pogo,



who has to ascend to the top of eight towers in the sea and bring them crashing down. However, the towers are littered with traps and enemies that will send you plummeting back down into a watery grave below. It's a simple, fun, and fiendish game requiring skill and smarts to negotiate the hazards. Indeed, the game can be a bit of a memory test as you learn the dangers of each tower. It's occasionally frustrating, but *Nebulus* oozes charm, and the graphical rotation of the towers is visually impressive and novel for its time. It's a real gem, this one.

Uridium (C64/Spectrum)

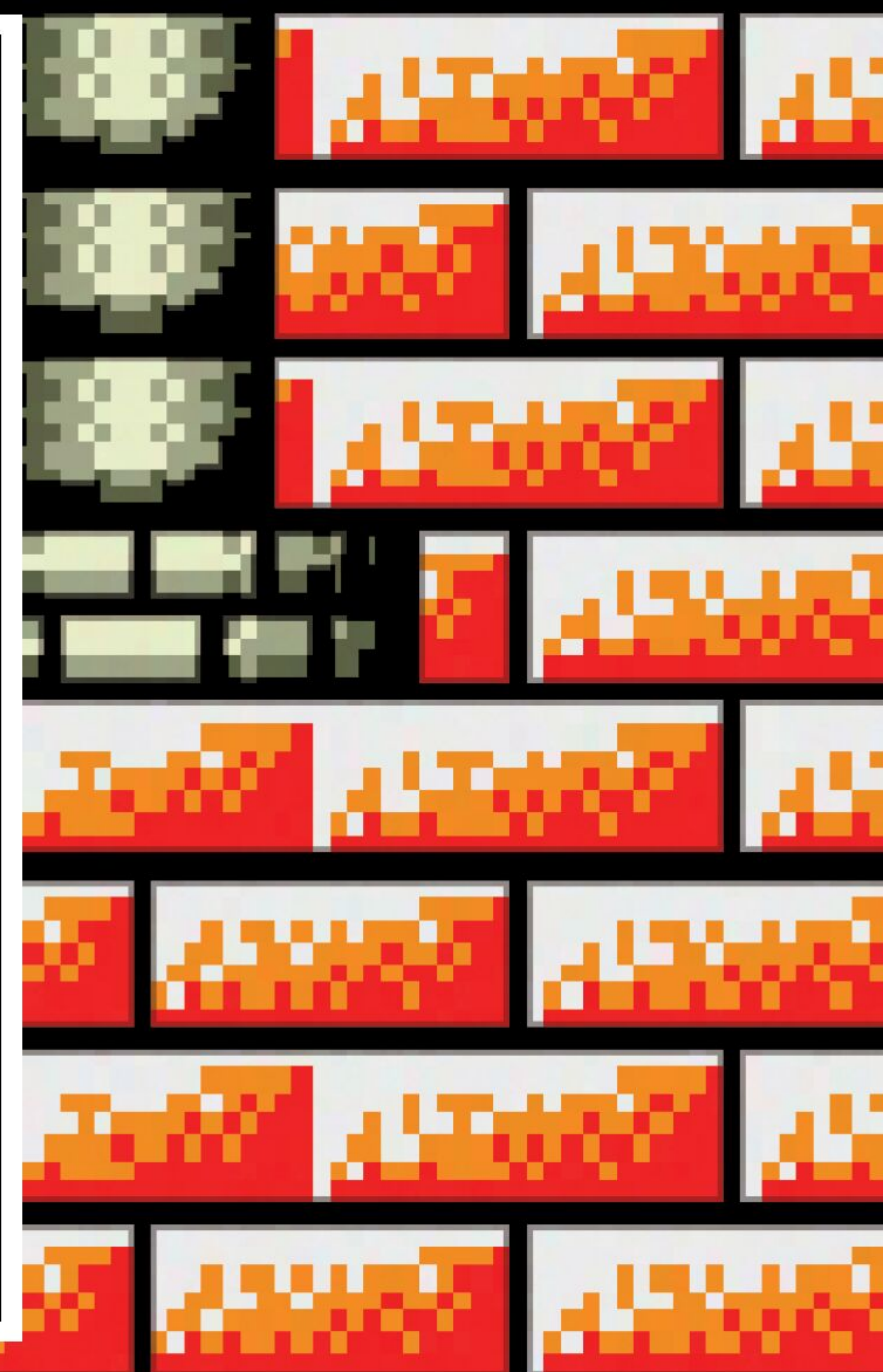
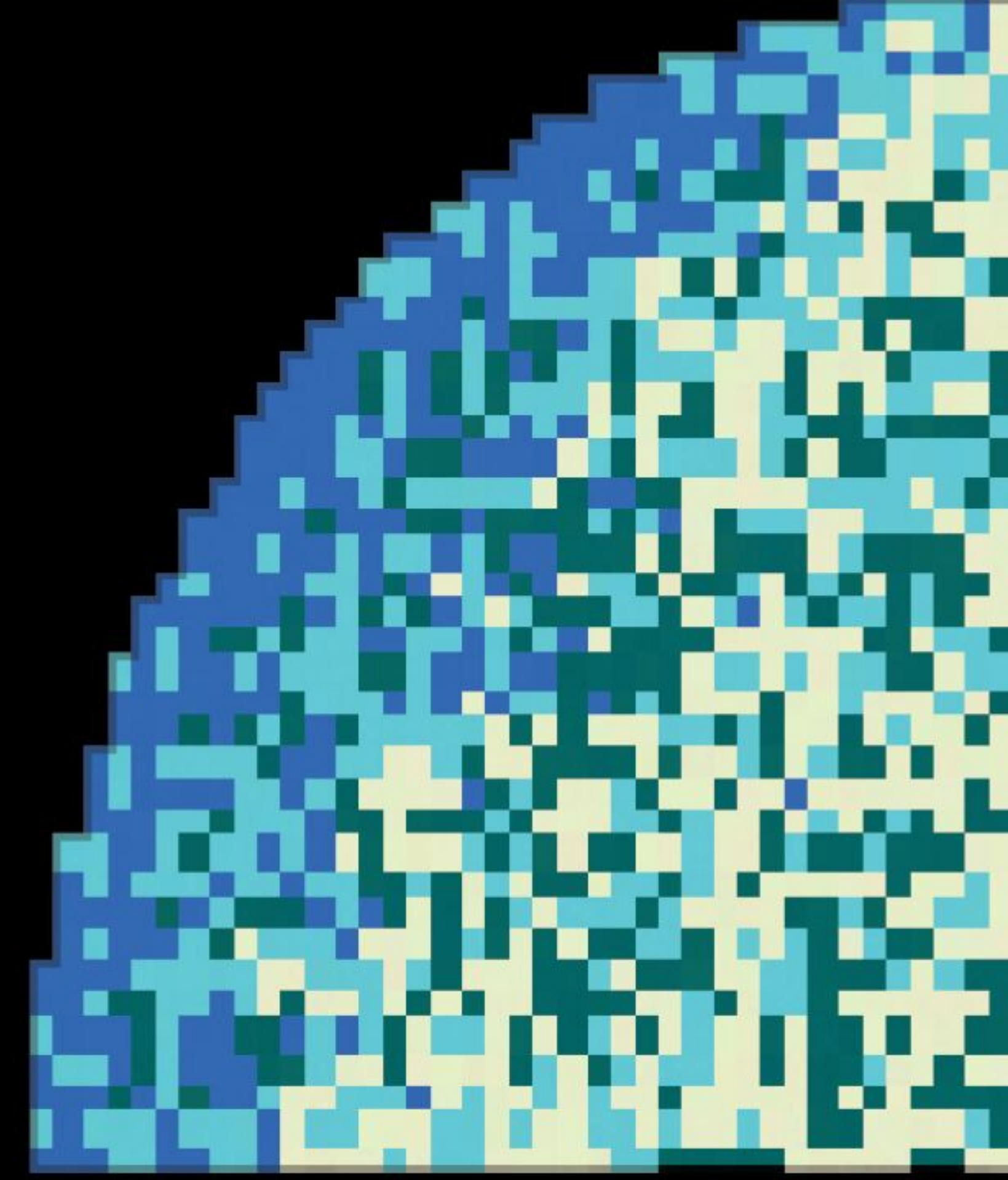
Andrew Braybrook's iconic shoot-em-up *Uridium* is another example of Hewson's quality. In this game, you must fly your Manta craft across the surface of dreadnoughts, destroying as many of their defences as possible, both in the form of ships and ground targets. Once you've done a certain amount of damage to a dreadnought, you'll be prompted to land and initiate the destruct sequence before flying on to the next one. It's a fast-paced and tremendously

enjoyable blaster. Both Spectrum and Commodore 64 versions are available, and the C64 version in particular shines with lightning-fast smooth scrolling and high-tempo gameplay, although the Spectrum version is far from a slouch. It's a tough game at first, requiring quick reflexes, but once you've mastered the basics, you'll keep coming back for more.

Paradroid & Paradroid 90

(C64/Amiga)

Paradroid is another Andrew Braybrook classic, originally released in 1985. The game's novel combination of shoot-em-up and puzzle action led to it receiving critical acclaim, and even now, many believe it to be one of the greatest C64 games ever made. The aim is to regain control of a spaceship that hostile robots have taken over. You're in control of a droid that, while initially weak in strength and firepower, has the crucial ability to take control of enemy robots by defeating them in a fast-paced puzzle minigame where you need to light up more nodes in the system than your opponent. You'll explore each floor, destroying or commandeering enemy robots until none remain, then take the lift to another floor and repeat. *Paradroid* was later remade for the Amiga in the form of *Paradroid 90*, which retains much of the gameplay but takes advantage of the Amiga's superior graphics capabilities. It's an excellent version for the 16-bit system. Whichever version you prefer, *Paradroid* is an outstanding game that everyone should experience at least once.



Netherworld

(Amstrad/C64/Spectrum/Amiga)

In *Netherworld*, you're trapped in another dimension and must pilot your ship around large scrolling levels, collecting enough diamonds to buy your freedom. Once you've collected all the diamonds, you can exit the level via a teleporter and take on the next one. Opposing you are various nasties, alien generators, demons that spew out enemies you'll have to shoot or avoid, and some light puzzle

elements, mostly pushing rocks into crushers to turn them into diamonds. It's a decent but difficult shooter, with strict time limits on each level, and you'll usually have to learn the layout to collect all the diamonds in time. Antstream has four versions of this game; the 8-bit versions are excellent, with the Amstrad CPC version receiving extra props or taking advantage of the CPC's impressive colour capabilities. The Amiga version is perhaps a little lacklustre simply because it falls short of what the Amiga is capable of. *Netherworld* is not a top-tier Hewson game, but the look, sound, and atmosphere certainly make it of interest.

Ranarama

(C64/Spectrum)

Another underrated gem, *Ranarama* takes a few cues from *Gauntlet* while putting its own unique stamp on the formula. In this one, you play Mervyn, an apprentice sorcerer who's managed to turn himself into a frog. To reach and defeat the evil warlocks, you must battle through dungeons, blasting enemies with spells. When you encounter a warlock, you enter into a magical duel, a mini puzzle game where you have to rearrange the letters of the word "Ranarama". If you

triumph, the warlock will drop runes, which you can use to craft spells by activating a floor glyph. This mechanic adds a layer of strategy and complexity, which puts *Ranarama* ahead of the curve, with the player able to forge powerful offensive and defensive spells necessary to survive the deeper levels. You'll also need an active power spell because it's game over if you die without one. *Ranarama* might not appeal to everyone, but for me, this is an excellent take on the *Gauntlet* formula and one in which you can easily lose hours. ■





POKÉ

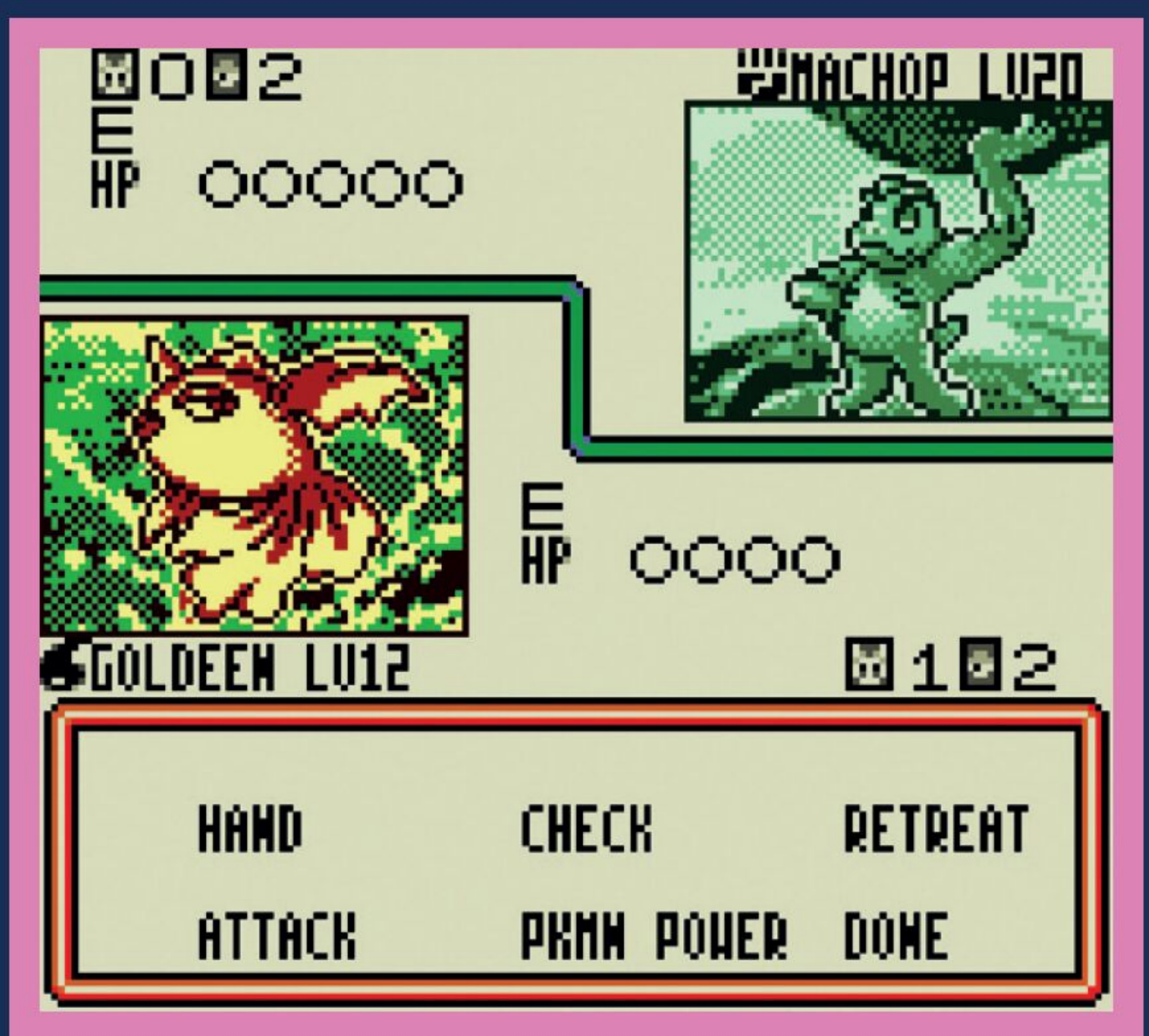
BEN MAGNET WANTS YOU TO PLAY A GAME.

■ In 1999, you couldn't walk down the street without hearing something about *Pokémon*. The Game Boy games came out the year prior, the anime had every kid waking up at the crack of dawn on Saturday morning, and the hottest thing on the playground was *Pokémon* trading cards. When the card game was released, millions of kids everywhere begged their parents for packs (myself and my little brother included). The goal? To snag the coveted holographic Charizard and become the most popular kid in school.

While kids everywhere were buying booster packs, there was one problem: hardly anyone knew HOW to play the *Pokémon Trading Card Game*. Even when my parents would relent and buy my brother and me starter decks, the rule book included a line saying, "Don't read this booklet unless you've played *Pokémon Trading Card Game* before." This message seemed unclear to two elementary school kids, and our parents tried to decipher the rules, but to no avail. Nearly 25 years have passed since then, and I've finally learned how to play the game, thanks to the *Pokémon Trading Card Game* for the Game Boy Color.

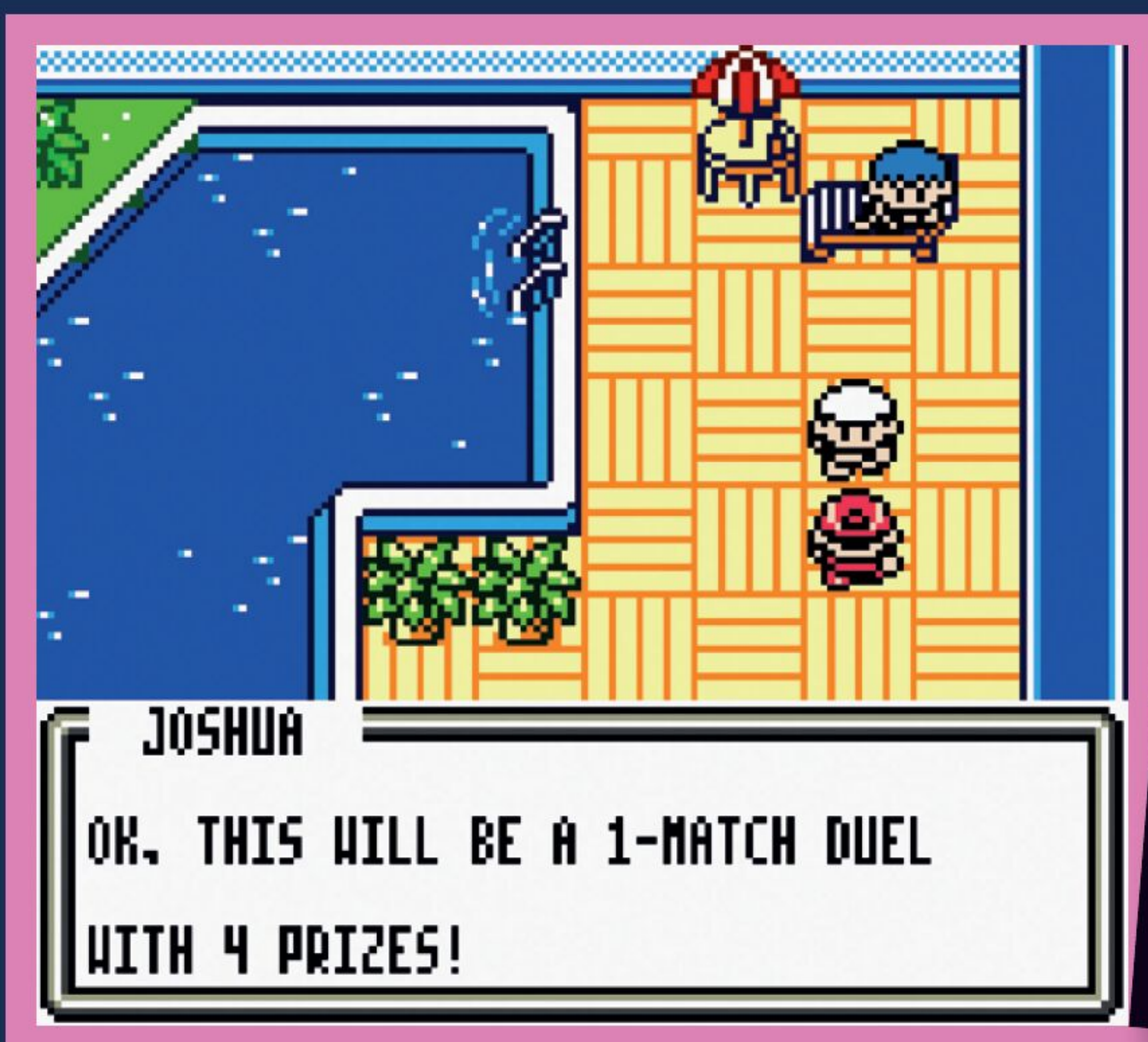
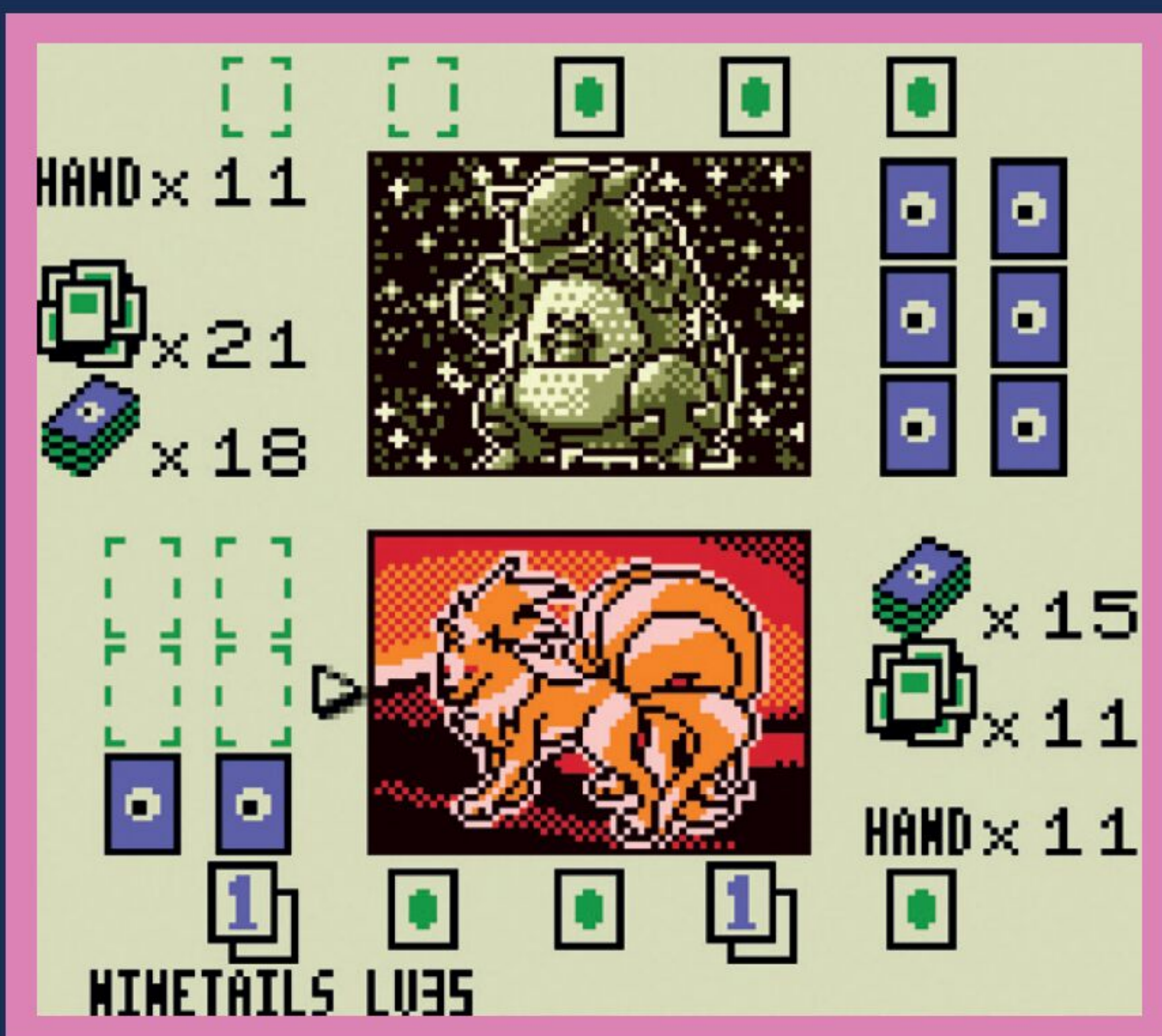
The one job that *PTCG* does exceedingly well is to teach people how to play the card game. The tutorial takes you through a game

TRADING C



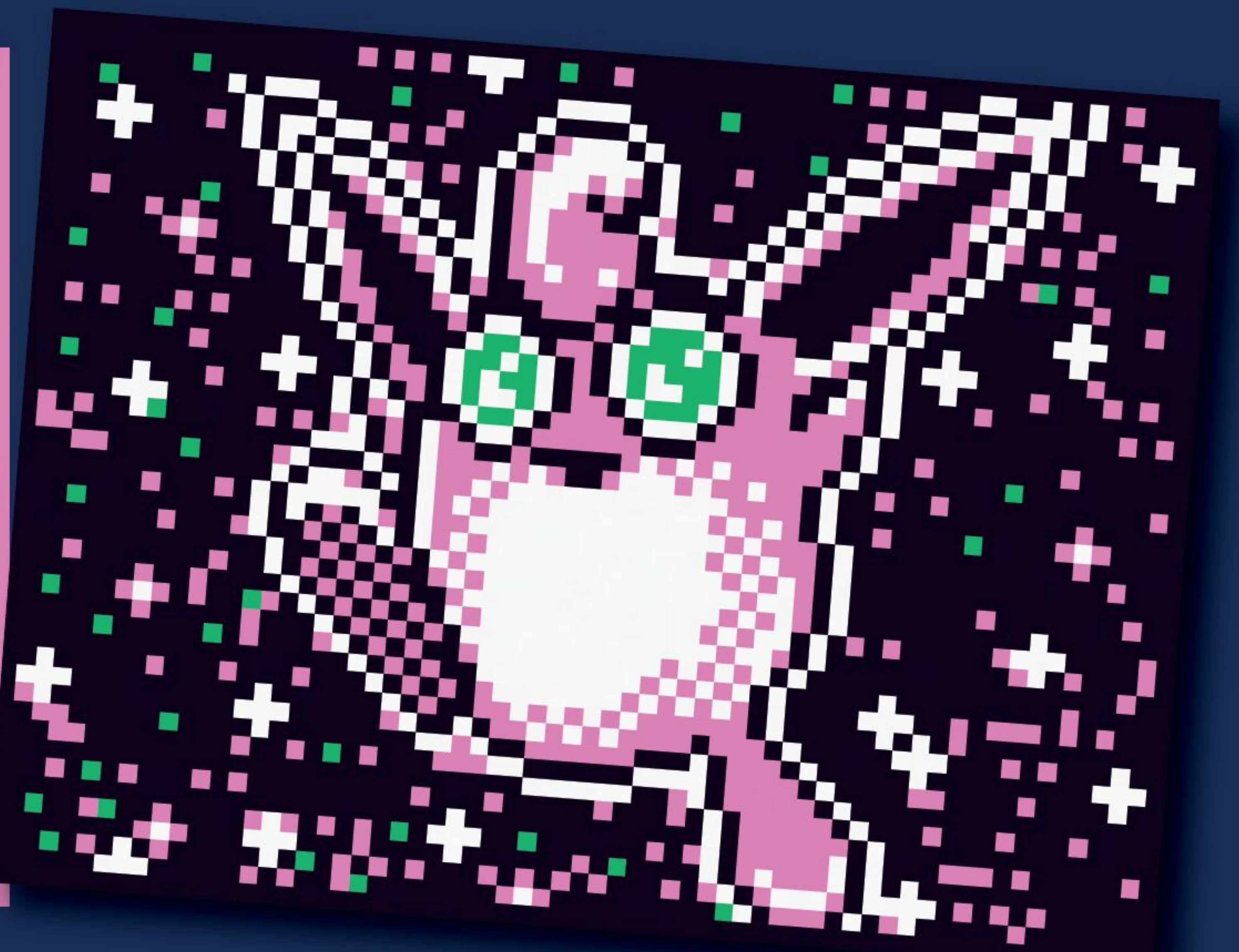
POKÉMON

CARD GAME



step by step, explaining the rules, what you can or can't do during a turn, and the conditions for winning a game. For a GBC game, the explanation is thorough, and the gameplay is quite engaging. After completing the tutorial, you pick your starter deck and challenge the eight gyms representing the different Pokémon card types. The fun thing about *PTCG* is that you can choose which gym to go to at the start, so you won't be cursing the Poké-Gods for picking the Charmander deck and forcing you to fight the Water gym first.

You can earn more cards by duelling with NPCs. Challenging the same NPC repeatedly (including gym leaders) will earn you valuable booster packs to make stronger decks. While the gameplay may seem simple, the developers were able to translate the card game to the GBC exceedingly well. While not as flashy as the regular *Pokémon* games, the translated card art is spot on, and the limited screen space is utilised so all the important information is easily readable. The only thing holding this game back is its age. The sets included are the first base set and Fossil and Jungle. The rules have also changed over the last twenty years, and playing modern cards with older rules won't work well. Thankfully, the card game's core mechanics are still intact today, so if you're interested in playing the physical *PTCG*, the GBC game is a great place to start. It's available on the Nintendo Switch Online Game Boy app, and loose copies of the game still sell for a reasonable price on eBay (£19-£25/\$25-\$30), making the game very accessible. ■



FUSION REACTOR

A MONTH IN THE LIFE OF GAMING.

THE FUSION TEAM

IT'S A MONTH OF MIXED REACTIONS FROM THE TEAM, WITH SOME EXPLORING THE STARS AND OTHERS AWAITING SOMETHING NEW



George Sturgeon:

Due to the recent mini heatwave, I've spent more time outdoors than

in front of that little device that generates even more heat (otherwise known as my laptop). Despite this, I've discovered *Century: Age of Ashes*, a fast-paced dragon-centric multiplayer title recommended to me, and it certainly impresses in several areas. On the TV and movie front, always being late to the party, I've just managed to finish season one of *The Boys* on Amazon Prime. It's a clever and entertaining twist on the Superhero genre. FUSION-wise, I continue to chip away at various gaming franchises, waiting for something special to catch my eye for that next article while praying for cooler evening temperatures. Judging by the weather over the last few days, I may have just got my wish!



Zoë Kirk-Robinson:

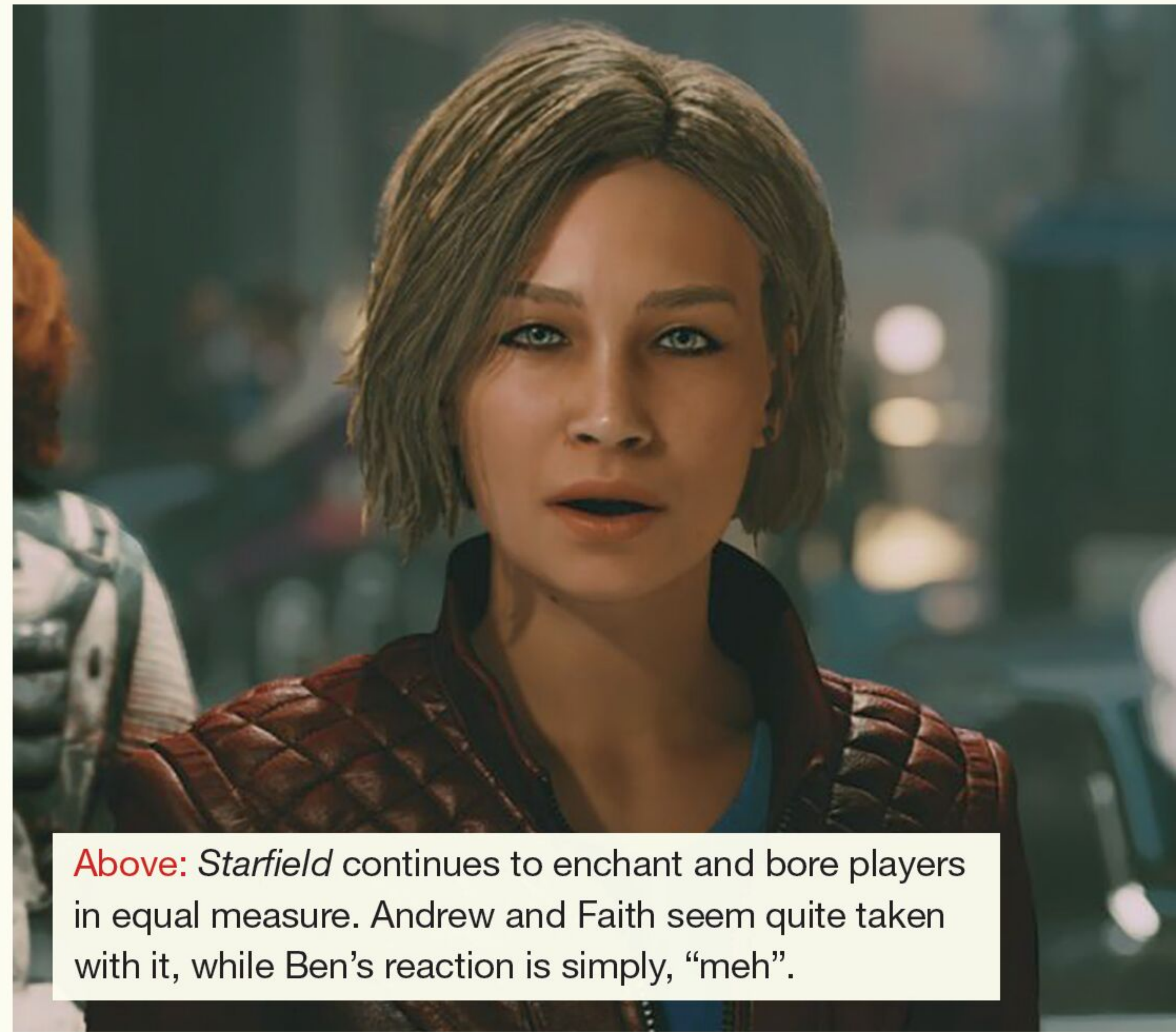
This month felt like the time to play a shooter game. I don't know why. Maybe it's

the oncoming Christmas period and the realisation that soon it will be the season to spend a lot of time with family. So, I took a chance on the *Borderlands Legendary Collection* on Switch, which was recently on sale. It plays surprisingly well on the Switch's comparatively tiny screen. But all the charm of gunning down enemies with primary-coloured controllers can't save you from a truly boring, overly repetitive experience.



Alan Hammerton:

The days are getting noticeably shorter, so it's time to return to one of my favourite games – *Civilisation VI*. A group



Above: *Starfield* continues to enchant and bore players in equal measure. Andrew and Faith seem quite taken with it, while Ben's reaction is simply, "meh".

of friends and I have been playing the various iterations of *Civ* for way longer than I care to remember, a game that has given us thousands of hours of gaming fun. *Civ VI* has been our game of choice since its release in 2016 and was a lifesaver during the dark days of the Covid lockdown in 2020. For a game that is nearly eight years old, I'm not bored of playing it, but I have to admit I'm starting to have yearnings for something new, something different. Bring on *Civilisation VII*!



Andrew Oyston:

Starfield has arrived, and although a slow burn to begin with, it delivers mostly

on what Bethesda promised. It makes me want *Elder Scrolls VI* even more. It's also been a good news month for point-and-click fans, with a 4K capable *Broken Sword* remaster, an in-development *Broken Sword VI* and, last but not least, Tall Story Games' *Heir of the Dog* all coming in 2024! It was almost enough to make me forget the teaser for a *Back to the Future/PowerWash Simulator* crossover. I wonder if they'll do a *Babylon 5* one...

COLD

PARTIAL REACTIVITY

NEUTRON FLUX

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promised? Probably not, but I think giving it away on Game Pass was a masterstroke that Nintendo and Sony will be looking at with raised eyebrows.

**Paul Twist:**

As a huge Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles fan for over 30 years, one of my highlights this month was the launch of the Operation Shredder's *Revenge*, which adds fan-favourite character Usagi Yojimbo as a playable character. I'm also a huge *Mario* fan, so the announcement of remakes of *Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door* and *Mario vs. Donkey Kong* was very welcome indeed. I've never played *The Thousand Year Door*, and buying the original release is prohibitively expensive. I suppose it must have been another quiet month if my highlights were DLC and remakes.

**Toy Polloi:**

Afew months back, I started a new Toy Polloi series for my Patreons and YouTube Channel Members called 'On the cutting mat'. The idea was to show simple repair projects I do for my own entertainment, the sort of things I do when I'm not filming. Very few people get to see them, but they bring me great joy. I enjoy fixing toys, even if it's not for a video, which must be a good thing...

**Faith Johnson:**

F-Zero 99 blasted onto my Switch from nowhere this month. Trust Nintendo to drop something cool when everyone was grumbling. It's not quite the new *F-Zero* game I wanted, but it'll keep me happy for a while and give Nintendo some idea of how much appetite there is out there for a full game in the future. I've also been enjoying *Starfield*, and this month's opinion piece gives insight into how much the modern gaming world can get muddled up with controversy. Those annoyances aside, it's excellent and provides a fantastic space romp to escape into. Is it the instant classic we were

**Ben Honebone:**

It's been a spine-torturously intensive month, with me either sitting at the computer working or sitting at the Xbox gaming. My only actual exercise was a gig in the middle of the month. I really should get back to climbing mountains in the rain... Anyway, I've been unimpressed with *Starfield* so far. I'm about five hours in, and I'm struggling - meh. *Armored Core VI* is much more fun, and I've almost finished it, so expect a review of that next issue. Speaking of the next issue, it's the BIG FIVE-O! We've got some special articles lined up for it, including a closer look at what goes into producing an issue of FUSION every month, a look at the history of the mag so far, and remember those Fusion Retro Books collectors cards? Did you catch 'em all?

Last, but not least, the whole team sends best wishes to Andrew Fisher for a speedy recovery. Despite being laid up in hospital, Andrew still managed to deliver a review for this month's issue. That's dedication! ■



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